CHAPTER 5:

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The present chapter concludes the study by summarizing key findings in the context of research questions and research objectives. The conclusion segment connects the findings with theoretical framework of the study and similarities and differences with major studies in the same field exploring media and disability. Discussion includes reflection on themes emerging from the study, whereas recommendations have points that could help the media and disability sectors to understand each other better. Limitations of the study outlines methodological and practical limitations of the present study, whereas suggestion for further research concludes the chapter by building upon the limitations and emerging fields.

5.2 Summary of Findings

The present section summarizes the findings from Chapter 4 and connects them with the research questions and research objectives. In context of the seminal changes such as introduction of Accessible India and the word 'Divyang' in December 2015 and passing of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act in December 2016 for the disability sector, the present study aimed at understanding media's response to it. Here is an objectives-wise summary of findings.

5.2.1 Change in coverage of disability issues by mainstream media

The research question resulted in two objectives – to examine and quantify print media coverage of disability sector for three years of 2015, 2016 and 2017, and to study the difference between pre-Act and post-Act (RPwD Act) coverage of disability issues in newspapers including terminology.

- The analysis found 331 stories related to disability in Divya Bhaskar, a Gujarati-language daily newspaper, and 433 in The Times of India, an English-language daily newspaper, over three years. In both newspapers, 2016 saw the highest number of stories, with slight rise in Divya Bhaskar in 2017 compared to 2015, whereas coverage in The Times of India saw a slight dip

- Major differences in both the newspapers in 2015 and 2017 included

    - Rise in disability-related stories on front page and stories with positive tone in Divya Bhaskar, no major change in The Times of India

    - Rise in stories with progressive models of disability and fall in traditional models of disability in both newspapers

- Rise in feature stories and human-interest subjects in The Times of India, and no major change in Divya Bhaskar
- Rise in coverage of 'new' disabilities added in the Act, but share of visible disabilities such as blindness and locomotor disabilities remained the highest
- Rise in use of 'Divyang' as preferred word to describe a person with disabilities in Divya Bhaskar, The Times of India used word sparsely
- Fall in word count and rise in use of pictures in Divya Bhaskar, no major change in The Times of India
- No major change in direct quotes of persons with disabilities, but rise in stories with no direct quotes in both newspapers

5.2.2 Persons with disabilities (PwDs)' perception of media coverage and impact of technology on media consumption

The research question resulted in two objectives – to understand perception of the persons with disabilities and other stakeholders (their parents or immediate relatives in this study's context) on depiction of disability in mainstream media, and to examine how persons with disabilities consume media with use of new technology.

- Major takeaways from the perception scale analysis included
  - Majority of the respondents **agreed** that reporters should be sensitized about disability issues, social media is easier to take up issues compared to mainstream media, presence of a person with disability can have positive impact on quality and frequency of coverage, media's focus on disability is on special days, information on social media is more useful, use of 'Divyang' by media has increased, media representation of disability is stereotypical, and NGO newsletters/ websites have more specific information
  - Majority of the respondents were **neutral about** the statements including a) media using the word of language that should not be used anymore, b) media representation of disability can have a strong impact on society's perception of disability, c) media's primary focus on visible disabilities in coverage, d) media giving motivational stories about persons with disabilities, e) media being the primary medium to interact with persons with disabilities for the rest of society, f) 'Divyang' being an appropriate word to describe persons with disabilities, g)

the image of persons with disabilities in media closer to reality, and h) media giving important information on organizations working in the field of disability

- Majority of the respondents **did not agree** that a) media raises critical issues related to disability sector, b) persons with disabilities can share their views with media, c) media gives important information on schemes related to disability, and d) media representation of disability is satisfactory

- There was no difference in perception based on factors such as gender, age, or education of the respondents. Relatives had more positive outlook towards media portrayal of disability than respondents with disabilities. Likewise, those who were spending more than 15 minutes on media and those who were reading more than one newspaper had more positive outlook

- The findings indicated that compared to conventional media, including TV and newspapers, persons with disabilities were consuming websites and news applications of media outlets more to get news. Media other than newspapers got much more time than newspapers with social media identified as the primary source of news related to disability sector

5.2.3 Factors determining coverage of disability-related issues in media

The research question had the objective to identify key issues related to the representation of disability sector and persons with disabilities in mainstream media.

- Major takeaways from the in-depth expert interviews included

  - The key role played by media in context of disability sector to dispel myths, creating realistic picture of persons with disabilities for society, and intervention to address issues was acknowledged

  - Criticism for media was on factors including lack of technical knowledge, limited focus and focus on special days, and promoting stereotypes. Experts suggested improving interaction and organizing workshops or seminars to bridge the gap

  - NGOs were identified as a force for advocacy and a support system for community. But they were found to be lacking media strategy and a unified voice, focusing too much on fundraising or charity and failing to tap potential of media perspective

- The word 'Divyang' evoked mixed reactions, but majority of interviewees agreed on its impact in forging new identity for persons with disabilities. Majority of interviewees said that Accessible India and the RPwD Act were introduced with a good intention but lacked on-ground implementation

- Social media was identified as a major factor in context of disability sector to disseminate information quickly and to a vast audience to circumvent mainstream media. But they were found to be lacking in credibility factor due to absence of checks and balances

5.3 Conclusion

The present study delved on the theoretical aspects of disability studies and journalism and posits that the factors such as a government-run movement (Accessible India), a word popularized by the PM (Divyang), and a law (The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016) did impact the media and disability sector relationship in measurable terms.

The word 'Divyang' became the most-used word to describe PwDs in Gujarati media in 2016 and 2017; new disabilities such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD), blood-related disorders, and so on got more coverage in 2016 and 2017, which could be seen as the impact of the RPwD Act; and there were more articles, including editorials, highlighting issues of accessibility and equal opportunities for PwDs, which could be seen as impact of Accessible India. A stellar performance by the Indian contingent at Rio Paralympics 2016 added to the positive impact on the media coverage with special segments and editorials.

The perception of PwDs and relatives and experts also highlighted pros and cons – majority agreed that the external factors such as the movement, word, or act surely had an impact, but it was not enough given its perceived scope. Media's view of disability largely remained the same in context of type and nature of stories in print media that indicated little or no improvement owing to the factors listed above.

5.3.1 Study's Position in Theoretical Framework

The study had employed theories from both journalism studies and disability studies to understand the important period (2015 and 2016) in context of disability in India. The following points highlight how the present study affirms or contradicts these theoretical frameworks –

5.3.1.1 Media Theories

Three major theories including Media Framing, Agenda Setting, and Social Responsibility of Media were taken as a basis for the discourse. Priming as part of the Agenda setting was also seen as a factor for the discourse. Media framing was expanded more in the disability theories.

Media Framing: Dominant frames in the media discourse included the PwDs seen as achievers (sports-related stories), recipients of charity or help (donation/ public event/ employment-related stories), danger to the society (mental illness-related stories), victims (crime-related stories), wards of the societal system (legal stories), and inspiration (human-interest stories). No major change was observed in the framing over the three years. Further discussion on media framing in context of disability is in the first section of disability theories.

Agenda Setting: The theory implies role of media on both '*what the public thinks about and how the public thinks about it.*' The present study indicated that with use of specific frames, media strengthened some of the existing stereotypes (achievers, recipients of charity, inspiration, victims). However, with the change in societal approach and attitude towards disability along with influence of Accessible India and 'Divyang' as a frame to look at persons with disabilities in 2015 and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act in 2016, the portrayal became slightly progressive – the stories included issues of persons with disabilities with government aid (Bhalaji Damor story), difficulties in medical aid (Rise in Cochlear implant price story), progressive government policies and rules (new sports policy of Gujarat story), equal opportunities and important part of the society (PwDs employed in Gujarat-based companies story, a person with blindness giving jobs to other PwDs story) and editorials on the merits of accessibility to cite a few.

Editorials – considered to be the view of the newspapers on any issue – were very less at 14 in both newspapers combined. They were found to be on topics such as murder of an English professor with disability, importance of looking after children with disabilities, Accessible India, International Day of Persons with Disabilities, Paralympics, Making trains disability-friendly, and identity of 'Divyang.'

The questionnaire along with perception scale and interviews involving PwDs, and experts underlined the role of media in context of disability to dispel myths and give the right information about disabilities. Interviewees specifically mentioned media's role to take up issues of PwDs, affirming to the agenda setting role of media.

Media and Social Responsibility: The theory points to media's obligation to 'be truthful, fair, objective and relevant to the public served.' More importantly, it calls on public journalism to pursue the goals of 'improved quality of civic life and foster public discussion' and 'safeguarding the rights of the individual by serving as a watchdog.'

In context of the present study, the share of issues covered by newspapers related to disability such as accessibility, equal rights and opportunities, access to education and employment, and implementation of the laws related to disability was found to be low compared to human interest and other feature stories.

5.3.1.2 Disability Theories

Three major theories including Disability framing in media, Disability stereotypes in media, and Critical disability theory were taken as a basis for the discourse. Though a relatively new field, disability studies draw heavily on disciplines such as sociology, minority, and gender studies to put the disability in societal perspective.

Disability Framing in Media: The present study followed the model of Clogston (1990, 1994), Haller (1998, 2010) and Haller and Burns (2015) for the 'disability framing' in media representation. Following the Haller and Burns classification, the present study divided the stories in Traditional (Medical, Social pathology, Supercrip, Business) and Progressive (Minority/ civil rights, Legal, Cultural pluralism, Consumer) models of disability.

It was found that the stories following the traditional models of disability got reduced in both the newspapers under the study period. Both the newspapers showed either rise or status quo in progressive models. The interviewees said that the disability representation is more progressive even as stories following medical and supercrip models continue to be employed.

'Divyang' word could also be seen as an attempt to give honourable position in public discourse and reduce a number of terminologies used for the PwDs.

Disability Stereotypes in Media: Earlier studies such as Biklen and Bogdan (1977, 1985), and Nelson (1994) identified stereotypes associated with PwDs including the PwDs portrayed as object of pity, object of violence, as evil, as irrelevant atmosphere, as superhuman, as laughable, as his/her own worst enemy, as a burden, as either asexual or sex deprived, and as incapable of meaningful participation in society.

The present study did not find major negative stereotypes such as laughable, his/her own worst enemy, burden, or evil. While sexuality of the PwDs was not discussed in the newspapers under

study barring one story in The Times of India in 2015, only a few stories portrayed PwDs as victims or propagators of violence. Increasingly high number of stories showed PwDs in positive light and them being important and meaningful part of society given the right opportunity.

Critical Disability Theory: Over the years, critical disability theory (CDT) is identified as a methodology that 'involves scrutinizing not bodily or mental impairments but the social norms that define particular attributes as impairments, as well as the social conditions that concentrate stigmatized attributes in particular populations' (Schalk, 2017).

The study identified that while interviewees and respondents of the perception scale wished the media to play the role of bridging the gap between the disability community and society at large, it did not actively play the role to challenge the societal status quo related to disability. However, media did respond to the changes such as changing attitude towards disability, identification of accessibility and equal opportunities as a right of PwDs and giving them a seemingly more respectable identity as 'Divyang.'

5.3.2 Findings in Context of Earlier Studies

The present section takes up from the Review of Literature and compares the findings of the present study with the themes identified by earlier studies to provide a

Representation of PwD/ Disability: Two previous doctoral studies from India (both in 2015) had a similar research design where both took two newspapers for one year for comparative analysis of disability coverage. The studies had highlighted issues such as city-centric coverage, focus on special days, more reporting on visible disabilities, lack of technical knowledge, disability-first language, and medical model, among others.

The present study paints a slightly improved scenario – while the coverage has remained city-centric and focusing on visible disabilities, there was improvement in language used, more varied coverage and slow but steady use of progressive models while framing disabilities.

A 2020 study from China had highlighted that there were fewer articles with direct quotes from PwDs and high share of Paralympics articles. The present study also found similar trend with spike in coverage during 2016 during Paralympics, and relatively a smaller number of articles with direct quotes from PwDs.

A 2019 study from Kenya had found that more than half the stories followed traditional models of disability. About 60% of articles had no specific disability mentioned whereas 28% were

about visible disabilities. The present study found that the share of traditional models fell over three years, whereas the disability mentioned were more diffused.

Media Terminology: A 2010 study covering six African countries identified usage of 'handicapped' and 'persons with disabilities' as most-used words to describe PwDs. Use of graphic language such as 'polio martyr' and 'destitute person with leprosy-bitten limbs' was also found along with derogatory words such as 'retarded person.' A 2006 study in the US also found the similar terminology. Several other studies cited in the Review of Literature mentioned usage such as handicapped, deaf, and blind where it was 'disability-first.'

The impact of 'Divyang' was apparent in the present study where it was found to be the most-used word by regional language replacing 'Viklang' and other terminologies describing the conditions in 2016 and 2017. In English newspaper, the impact however was very less where 'person with disability' and 'disabled' were found to be the most-used words. However, over three years, 'person-first' usage was found to be increasing.

Disability and New/ Social Media: Several studies covered in review highlighted the conventional media's 'inability to deliver content aligned with public interest' in context of disability sector and social media providing a platform to put forth accurate representation free from stereotypes. Several scholars argued that internet and by extension new media 'holds the potential for disabled people to take responsibility of their own image and to alter popular perception.'

The present study found that the PwDs used internet and news media apps as the primary source of getting news, whereas social media was the fourth most-used medium after television and newspapers. While the interviewees said that social media and internet has reduced dependency on conventional media, the perception scale respondents said that the information on social media is more useful in context of disability sector.

Impact of Disability Laws: A 2015 study indicated that The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) resulted in progressive, fair, and accurate representation of disability in news media. Another study however indicated that the laws per se do not garner much media attention as the target social group is traditionally marginalized.

The present study found both the arguments to be applicable in the Indian context where the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (along with Accessible India and terminology 'Divyang') did impact the coverage in context of inclusion of new disabilities, advocacy about

accessibility and equal opportunities and widespread use of Divyang. However, in context of overall media coverage, such discourses took a very small space.

Summary: In the light of the previous studies and research papers, it is found that the representation of PwDs improved in India after 2015 with news stories that followed progressive models, used more appropriate words to describe PwDs along with person-first language, and had a relatively wider coverage from local, state, national and international sources. The coverage was also found to be much diverse in terms of topics and days (coverage outside of special/ commemorative days).

However, the media coverage pattern for disability-related stories – as observed in several studies – remained focused on softer stories, human-interest topics, success-against-all-odds trope and devoid of critical look at implementation of government policies or societal approach to disability. New/ social media emerged as a major force in both questionnaire along with perception scale and interviews as a mean to overcome the shortcomings of conventional media.

5.4 Discussion

The present study resulted in two academic research papers. The first paper was about use of assistive devices and media consumption by the PwDs which corresponded to one of the research objectives to ascertain impact of new technology and media consumption habits of PwDs. The findings indicated that persons several disabilities such as visual impairment, and speech and hearing impairment rely heavily on their smartphones to interact with the world and get first-hand information. Results of the study also corroborated the findings of the paper by identifying websites and news applications as the first choice of PwDs to get news and social media as the fourth choice after television and newspapers.

The second paper compared the news coverage of India's performance in Paralympics in Rio de Janeiro (2016) and Tokyo (2020 – which took place in 2021 due to Covid pandemic). It corresponded to the research objective to quantify and compare the disability coverage. The results indicated a phenomenal rise in Paralympics coverage due to stellar performance of the Indian contingent in Tokyo and record high medal haul. The local coverage also improved due to participation of players from Gujarat and para–Table Tennis player Bhavina Patel winning silver for India in her category. The results also corroborated rise in disability sports coverage observed in the present study.

The present study contributes to the field of disability media studies (DMS) which is emerging as a distinct discipline that builds on the concepts of both the fields, but also addresses issues arising out of intersection of these fields. It explores the impact of both the fields on each other and how media representation shapes societal perception of disability.

The study's primary contribution is understanding the post-2015 media coverage from multiple points of view. The years 2015 and 2016, as elaborated in the study earlier, were seminal due to three factors – a campaign, a term for PwDs and an updated act. It is one of the few studies after the period to capture the impact of Union government-led initiatives and sentiments of the stakeholders on the same.

The findings would be of help to various stakeholders to improve interaction and understanding of the media and disability sector functioning. One of the takeaways from the findings was limited impact of disability-related initiatives except word 'Divyang' where it was found that starting an initiative alone does not result in its proliferation among stakeholders or acceptance – institutions such as government departments and NGOs working in the field must work hard to popularize it, create awareness about it.

While the present study focused on the period before and after the RPwD Act, its findings can also have implications for initiatives such as National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 where the Union government aims to promote barrier-free access to education for all including children with disabilities.

The study also builds upon the existing repository of knowledge of disability study and adds to international work on the intersection of media and disability. The research gap identified in the introduction chapter was resolved through the findings elaborated earlier in this chapter.

5.5 Recommendations

Findings of the present study can be relevant for different stakeholders ranging from media to government agencies and NGOs. It can also help those working with disabilities and media to understand the dynamics between the two. The specifics for the same are discussed below –

For Media

- Compared to other minorities, disability coverage was found to be relatively frequent but stereotypical. The coverage can be improved with more diverse coverage that focuses on all 21 disabilities recognized by the RPwD Act, 2016

- Terminology to describe PwDs has improved over the years, but still the usage found inappropriate by the PwDs and experts is being used that stigmatizes disability and creates negative impression for readers or viewers. It can be avoided

- Majority of the stories analysed were found to be features or soft stories with focus on human-interest angle. While stories of success-against-all-odds are inspirational, the community sentiments are to highlight issues and hard-hitting stories on lack of accessibility, implementation of government schemes and impact of technology in mainstream media

- While focus of media coverage – as perceived by the PwD respondents – was not found to be only on specific days, such days were found to have relatively higher frequency of coverage. Media can find avenues to creatively highlight disability issues on other occasions, too

- Regular interaction with NGOs working in the field, persons with disabilities, organizing workshops or seminars by experts could be some ways to improve awareness, understand right terminology and technical aspects of disability

- New media and social media are more accessible to PwDs especially those with visual impairment and speech and hearing impairment. A higher or better availability of accessible content would bring in more viewers or readers to the news outlet

For Government agencies and NGOs working in disability sector

- The first step would be to identify and acknowledge media as an important ally and partner in creating awareness about disability for a very wide audience. To attract media to a specific issue, NGOs along with other stakeholders should create events or opportunities that media can report on – it can also be a starting point if the media wishes to explore the topic more

- The organizations should rope in experts to interact with media and provide authentic, fact-based information whenever needed. NGOs are expected to raise pertinent issues related to specific disabilities to media

- While donations are lifeblood for the NGOs and the primary motivation for the NGOs to interact with media is to improve or create positive public image, it should not be the only focus – the connect with media should go beyond events and annual reports

- Regular interaction with media and workshops/ seminars by professional journalists or trainers can help key NGO officials to formulate media strategy including preparation

of press release, clicking pictures, providing timely information to press, and remaining available for any queries

- While media are criticized for narrow focus, NGOs often also remain narrow in their scope by not going beyond the disability they address, and fail to create a cohesive picture of all or major disabilities for media that might not have technical knowledge or technicalities of any act or policy. NGOs can engage with media on these aspects

- New media or social media has potential to work as a standalone media outlet and a bridge with the mainstream media – if a post or video garners a lot of attention, it also gets reflected in mainstream media coverage. NGOs can use it judiciously to amplify their message

5.6 Limitations

The present study has following limitations –

- The study focused on limited period of 2015 to 2017. Purpose of the present study was to assess the immediate impact of Accessible India, 'Divyang' terminology, and the RPwD Act, 2016

- The study looked at the coverage in two prominent newspapers and did not take into consideration TV and radio coverage, and coverage online due to paucity of time

- The respondents and media were primarily from Ahmedabad. The city was chosen as the commercial capital and hub of media activities in Gujarat. The study thus does not reflect the viewpoint of semi-urban or rural areas

- Common themes were derived through the three-pronged approach and thematic analysis

5.7 Suggestion for Future Research

Building upon the limitations of the present study, the future research in the discipline of Disability Media Study (DMS) in Indian context can investigate aspects including –

- A longitudinal study can investigate far-reaching implications of the Accessible India campaign, 'Divyang' word and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016. The act completed seven years of passing in the Parliament and six years of its notification in 2023. While not part of the present study, the media coverage has remained consistent

- A future study can encompass different media, increase the sample of the newspapers in terms of languages represented, compare coverage of TV vis-à-vis newspapers or other media or can take an all-encompassing view from a specific centre for a holistic view of media and disability

- Impact of social media was not the primary area of focus. But during research, it was found to be an important factor. Future researchers can study the impact of social media on conventional media or usage of social media by PwDs to raise their issues and concerns

- A future study can be conducted with a larger and more diverse sample of respondents geographically to assess whether their sentiments towards media differ in any way and due to which factors. The sampling techniques could be probability and there could be a higher pool of experts for their views or reflections

- A future study can employ qualitative approach to data for statistical validation and triangulation if mixed methods are used

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