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"Vernacular Journalism And Movement Politics: A Bourdieusian Analysis Of V6 News, The Telangana Movement, And Rural Media Transformation In South India"

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Abstract

This study examines the role of V6 News, a Telugu-language news channel launched in 2012, in shaping regional journalism during and after the Telangana statehood movement. The channel emerged as a distinct voice representing Telangana's cultural and political identity at a time when mainstream media was perceived to inadequately cover regional perspectives. This paper analyses V6 News's flagship programme, Teenmaar Varthalu, as a case study in vernacular journalism's effectiveness in rural communication. Drawing on scholarly literature on media sociology, regional language journalism, and movement studies, the research explores how the channel navigated the intersection of political activism, cultural representation, and commercial media operations. The study contributes to understanding how regional language media in India function as both chroniclers and participants in social movements, particularly in rural and semi-urban contexts.

Keywords: Telangana Movement, Regional Language Journalism, V6 News, Teenmaar Varthalu, Rural Media, Political Communication, Indian Media Studies

1. Introduction

The role of regional language media in India has undergone significant transformation in the twenty-first century, particularly in states undergoing political reorganisation. The formation of Telangana as India's 29th state in 2014 represented a watershed moment in contemporary Indian politics, and the media landscape played a crucial role in articulating regional aspirations. Among the news outlets that emerged during this period, V6 News occupies a distinctive position as a channel that evolved alongside the movement it covered. Launched on March 1, 2012, V6 News was founded by Ankam Ravi, a journalist with extensive experience in Telugu electronic media. The channel's establishment was not merely a commercial venture but responded to what scholars have identified as a representational deficit in existing media coverage of Telangana's distinct cultural and political identity. Professor Padmaja Shaw of Osmania University's Department of Communication and Journalism observed that prior to V6 News, the Telangana perspective had limited representation in mainstream media, and the channel played a significant role in amplifying regional viewpoints. This study examines V6 News through multiple analytical lenses: as a commercial media enterprise, as a participant in political movement coverage, and as an innovator in regional language journalism through programmes like Teenmaar Varthalu. The channel's motto, "News As It Is," and its commitment to reporting in the Telangana dialect represent deliberate strategies to establish authenticity and connection with rural audiences.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Regional Language Journalism in India

Scholarship on Indian journalism has traditionally focused on English-language media, but recent work has begun to address the complex ecosystem of regional language journalism. Bhargav Nimmagadda's ethnographic study, "Stringers and the Journalistic Field: Marginalities and Precarious News Labour in Small-Town India" (2023), provides a foundational framework for understanding how Telugu-language journalism operates in small towns and rural areas of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. Drawing on Bourdieu's field theory, Nimmagadda examines how caste, gender, class, and regional identities shape journalistic practices and the precarious labour conditions of stringers who form the backbone of regional news gathering.

This work is particularly relevant to understanding V6 News's operational context, as the channel's extensive rural reporting network relies on such informal news workers. The "mofussil" areas of Telangana—small towns and rural hinterlands—constitute both the channel's primary audience and its primary source of news content.

2.2 Media and Social Movements

The relationship between media and social movements has been extensively theorised in communication studies. Media can serve as advocates, neutral chroniclers, or opponents of social movements, and the coverage of movements often reflects broader power dynamics within the journalistic field. Yadav's study (2018) on media coverage of development projects and displacement in Telangana examines how media representation of contestations over projects like Mallannasagar reflects the politics of development in the region. This work highlights the complex position of regional media when covering conflicts between state development agendas and local resistance movements.

2.3 Vernacular Journalism and Cultural Identity

The use of regional dialects in journalism represents a significant departure from standardised language practices in Indian media. Teenmaar Varthalu's employment of Telangana dialect, comedic formats, and satire represents an innovation in Indian news programming that warrants scholarly attention. The programme's success, acknowledged by former Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhara Rao, demonstrates the political and cultural significance of vernacular journalism in contemporary India.

3. Methodology

This study employs qualitative content analysis and critical discourse analysis to examine V6 News's programming, with particular focus on Teenmaar Varthalu. Primary data sources include:

1. Archival news coverage from V6 News between 2012 and 2018
2. Scholarly analyses of Telangana movement media coverage
3. Academic literature on regional language journalism in India
4. Media industry reports and audience data

The analytical framework draws on Bourdieu's field theory as applied by Bhargava to examine the social, political, and economic forces shaping journalistic practice in Telangana. This approach allows for analysis of how V6 News navigated relationships with political actors, advertisers, audiences, and the broader journalistic field.

4. Findings and Analysis

4.1 V6 News and the Telangana Movement

V6 News launched during the intensifying phase of the Telangana movement, when demands for statehood had gained significant momentum. The channel's emergence addressed what its founders perceived as inadequate coverage of the movement by existing Telugu news channels based in the coastal Andhra region. As Shaw noted, the Telangana perspective was underrepresented in media discourse, and V6 News sought to fill this gap.

The channel's coverage of the movement combined conventional news reporting with cultural programming that reinforced Telangana identity. Festival-related content on Bathukamma and Bonalu celebrations showcased the region's distinct cultural heritage. This cultural dimension of coverage was not merely supplementary but central to establishing the channel's authenticity and connection with Telangana audiences.

4.2 Teenmaar Varthalu: Innovation in Vernacular Journalism

Launched on February 1, 2013, Teenmaar Varthalu became V6 News's flagship programme and a cultural phenomenon in Telangana. The programme's significance lies in its innovative format: a news satire show presented in Telangana dialect, hosted by characters such as Savithri and Bithiri Sathi, who became household names across the region.

The programme's approach to news—combining comedy, satire, and serious commentary—represented a departure from conventional Indian news formats. By adopting the Telangana dialect, the programme performed linguistic solidarity with rural audiences who often feel marginalised by standardised Telugu media. The then Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhara Rao's acknowledgment of the programme's role in shaping Telangana culture underscores its political and cultural significance.

The programme's characters, including Racha Ramulamma, Mallanna, and Teenmaar Lacchavva, served as vehicles for political commentary that might have been difficult to deliver through conventional news formats. This use of comedic characters to critique political figures and institutions represents a distinct genre of political communication that merits scholarly attention.

4.3 Rural Media Effectiveness

V6 News's effectiveness in reaching rural audiences can be attributed to several factors:

Linguistic Accessibility: The use of Telangana dialect in programming like Teenmaar Varthalu reduced the linguistic distance between urban media producers and rural audiences. This linguistic strategy aligned with broader cultural assertions of Telangana identity distinct from the coastal Andhra region.

Content Relevance: The channel's focus on regional issues, local sentiments, and developments across the state addressed information needs that were not being met by national or English-language media. Coverage of issues such as irrigation projects, land acquisition, and local governance resonated with rural audiences' lived experiences.

Distribution Strategy: V6 News leveraged multiple distribution platforms, including cable television, satellite, and digital platforms like YouTube. The channel's presence on digital platforms extended its reach to younger audiences and the Telugu diaspora .

Credibility Building: The channel's emphasis on objective reporting and its strategic news gathering network aimed to establish credibility with audiences . Awards recognition, including National Television awards and a UNICEF award for children's programming , contributed to institutional legitimacy.

4.4 Challenges and Tensions

Despite its success, V6 News navigated complex tensions inherent in regional journalism during political movements. The channel's close association with Telangana identity politics raised questions about journalistic objectivity and the boundaries between movement advocacy and news reporting.

The precarious labour conditions of stringers who form the backbone of rural news gathering, as documented by Bhargav , represent a structural challenge for regional journalism. The reliance on informal news workers in small towns creates vulnerabilities that affect news production and coverage patterns.

Additionally, the channel's commercial imperatives intersect with its political and cultural roles. As a private media enterprise, V6 News must balance its identity as a voice for Telangana with the need to attract advertising revenue and maintain audience engagement.

5. Discussion

5.1 Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to understanding how regional language media function within India's complex media ecology. V6 News's trajectory illustrates the emergence of a distinct journalistic sub-field oriented toward regional identity politics. Drawing on Bourdieu's field theory, the channel's position can be understood as occupying a space where political, cultural, and economic capitals intersect.

The channel's success suggests that regional identity and vernacular language can serve as forms of cultural capital that enable new entrants to challenge established media players. V6 News's ability to leverage the Telangana movement for audience building demonstrates how social movements and media enterprises can mutually reinforce each other, even as they maintain distinct institutional logics.

5.2 Comparative Perspectives

V6 News's experience offers comparative insights for understanding regional media in other contexts where linguistic and cultural identity movements intersect with journalism. Similar dynamics have been observed in regional media across India, including in states like Jharkhand, Uttarakhand, and Chhattisgarh, where statehood movements created conditions for new media voices to emerge.

The channel's use of comedy and satire in Teenmaar Varthalu also invites comparison with international examples of satirical news programmes that combine entertainment with political commentary. However, the programme's grounding in regional dialect and local cultural references distinguishes it from globally circulated formats.

5.3 Methodological Reflections

Studying regional language journalism presents methodological challenges related to language access, field access, and the need to account for the informal structures that characterise much of the industry. Bhargav's ethnographic approach offers a model for future research that can capture the lived experiences of journalists working in small towns and rural areas.

6. Conclusion

This study has examined V6 News as a case study in the intersection of regional language journalism, social movements, and rural media effectiveness in Telangana. The channel's emergence during the Telangana movement, its innovation in vernacular journalism through Teenmaar Varthalu, and its effectiveness in reaching rural audiences illustrate the complex dynamics shaping regional media in contemporary India.

Key findings include:

1. V6 News addressed a representational gap in media coverage of the Telangana movement, providing a platform for regional perspectives that were perceived as marginalised in mainstream media.
2. Teenmaar Varthalu represents a significant innovation in Indian journalism, combining satire, regional dialect, and political commentary in a format that resonated strongly with rural audiences.
3. The channel's effectiveness in rural communication derived from linguistic accessibility, content relevance, strategic distribution, and credibility building.
4. Regional language journalism operates within tensions between movement advocacy and professional objectivity, between cultural authenticity and commercial sustainability, and between formal journalistic roles and informal labour practices.

Future research should examine the long-term trajectory of V6 News as Telangana transitions from movement to established statehood, investigate the labour conditions of rural journalists in the region, and explore how digital platforms are reshaping regional language journalism.

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