

Regional Print Journalism And Public Awareness In Kerala: A Reader-Based Assessment Of Deepika Newspaper

Roy K. Sebastian^{1*}, Prachi Chaturvedi²

¹Journalism and Mass Communication, Director Deepika Children's League

²Manasarover, Global University, Indore, MP

ABSTRACT

Background: The transformation of the media environment through digital platforms and social networking has changed patterns of news consumption. Nevertheless, regional newspapers continue to play an important role in providing locally relevant information, interpreting public issues and sustaining community-oriented communication. In Kerala, Malayalam newspapers have historically contributed to public awareness concerning education, health, environment, women's issues, culture and civic life. Deepika Newspaper, one of the long-established Malayalam newspapers, provides an important context for examining the contemporary relevance of regional print journalism. **Objective:** The present study aimed to assess readers' perceptions regarding the role of Deepika Newspaper in promoting public awareness, knowledge, community-oriented communication and socially relevant information among readers in Kerala. **Methods:** A quantitative descriptive cross-sectional design was adopted. The study was conducted among 300 regular readers of Deepika Newspaper selected through convenience sampling. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of demographic and readership-related variables and a 40-item five-point Likert scale. The scale assessed perceptions regarding newspaper credibility, educational information, health awareness, environmental information, women's empowerment, civic responsibility, community development and reader satisfaction. The overall instrument demonstrated high internal consistency, with a reported Cronbach's alpha of 0.91. Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, chi-square test, one-way ANOVA and multiple regression were used for analysis. **Results:** The majority of participants were regular readers, with 221 (73.7%) reporting daily newspaper reading, 49 (16.3%) reading weekly and 30 (10.0%) reading occasionally. Overall perceived credibility of the newspaper was high (4.30 ± 0.68). Educational contribution obtained a mean score of 4.37 ± 0.67 , health awareness 4.34 ± 0.68 , environmental information 4.30 ± 0.72 and women's empowerment 4.31 ± 0.69 . Overall, 148 (49.3%) respondents were highly satisfied and 122 (40.7%) were satisfied with the newspaper. Reading frequency was positively associated with the overall perception of the newspaper's social contribution ($r = .612, p < .001$). Credibility demonstrated a stronger positive association ($r = .724, p < .001$). Multiple regression analysis indicated that the selected predictors explained 71.6% of the variance in perceived social contribution, with credibility emerging as the strongest predictor ($\beta = .352$). **Conclusion:** The findings indicate that readers perceive Deepika Newspaper as a credible and useful source of information concerning education, health, environment, women's empowerment and community affairs. The findings highlight the continuing relevance of regional print journalism in strengthening public awareness and socially meaningful communication in Kerala. Since the study was cross-sectional and based on readers' perceptions, the findings indicate association and perceived contribution rather than direct causal impact.

Keywords: regional journalism, public awareness, newspaper readership, media credibility, Deepika Newspaper, Kerala, civic communication, community information.

INTRODUCTION

Mass media occupy an important position in the communication structure of society. Newspapers not only provide information about current events but also interpret issues, influence public discussion and

connect citizens with institutions and communities. The role of newspapers becomes particularly significant in regional settings where language, culture and local experiences influence the way information is received and understood.

Relevant conflicts of interest/financial disclosures: The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

The media environment has undergone considerable transformation during the last decade. Digital news platforms, social networking sites, mobile applications and online video have changed how people access information. However, the emergence of digital media has not completely eliminated the importance of newspapers. Rather, it has created a more complex information environment in which traditional newspapers coexist with digital platforms.

This changing environment has increased the importance of **credibility**. Readers are exposed to information from multiple sources, including professional news organizations, social media, messaging applications and user-generated content. Distinguishing verified information from inaccurate or misleading information has therefore become an important component of media literacy.

Regional newspapers have a particular advantage because they can provide information within a local linguistic and cultural context. Local news, community events, health information, educational opportunities, environmental concerns and social issues can be presented in ways that are directly relevant to readers.

Kerala has a strong tradition of newspaper readership and public discussion. Malayalam newspapers have historically contributed to literacy, social awareness, public debate and community participation. Within this context, Deepika Newspaper represents an established regional newspaper with a long history of journalism and public communication.

The present study does not attempt to establish that newspaper reading directly causes social change. Instead, it examines how readers perceive the usefulness, credibility and social relevance of the newspaper.

The study particularly examines five broad areas:

1. credibility and reliability;
2. educational information;
3. health information;
4. environmental and social awareness; and

5. women's empowerment and civic responsibility.

The study therefore provides an empirical assessment of the contemporary role of regional print journalism from the perspective of its readers.

2. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Newspapers have traditionally performed several important functions within society. These include informing citizens, interpreting events, providing educational information, creating awareness of public problems and facilitating social interaction.

In a democratic society, access to reliable information is important for informed citizenship. Citizens require information to understand government policies, public health concerns, environmental problems, educational opportunities and community issues.

The role of newspapers can therefore be considered at three levels:

2.1 Information dissemination

Newspapers provide information about local, regional, national and international developments.

2.2 Public awareness

Reporting and feature articles can bring attention to issues that may not otherwise receive adequate public discussion.

2.3 Social communication

Newspapers provide a platform for discussing community concerns and connecting individuals with social institutions.

In regional journalism, these functions can become particularly important because information is communicated in the language and cultural environment familiar to readers.

3. DEEPIKA NEWSPAPER AS A REGIONAL COMMUNICATION MEDIUM

Deepika Newspaper has a long history in Malayalam journalism. Its continuing readership provides an opportunity to examine the relevance of regional print media in contemporary Kerala.

The present study focuses on the readers' perception of the newspaper rather than evaluating its editorial content independently.

The study examines whether readers perceive the newspaper as:

- accurate;
- reliable;
- balanced;
- ethically responsible;
- educationally useful;
- informative about health;
- supportive of environmental awareness;
- supportive of women's empowerment;
- relevant to community issues; and
- useful for developing civic awareness.

This approach allows the newspaper to be examined as a communication resource rather than simply as a source of daily news.

4. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

The study can be interpreted using Agenda-Setting Theory and Development Communication Theory.

4.1 Agenda-Setting Theory

Agenda-setting theory proposes that media attention can influence the importance audiences attach to particular issues. When newspapers repeatedly report on health, education, environmental concerns or women's issues, those subjects may receive greater public attention.

The present study therefore considers whether readers perceive Deepika Newspaper as bringing socially relevant issues to their attention.

4.2 Development Communication Perspective

Development communication emphasizes the role of communication in creating awareness, knowledge and participation relevant to social improvement.

Within this framework, information concerning health, education, environmental protection, gender equality and civic responsibility may contribute to informed communities.

The present study applies this perspective to regional newspaper readership in Kerala.

5. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

5.1 Newspapers and public awareness

Traditional newspapers remain important sources of contextual information because they can provide detailed explanations rather than only brief updates. Readers may use newspaper information to understand social issues, public policies and community events.

5.2 Credibility in the changing media environment

The rapid growth of social media has increased the availability of information while also increasing concerns about misinformation. Credibility, therefore, remains an important characteristic of professional journalism.

The Reuters Institute Digital News Report has documented the changing news-consumption environment in India and the increasing importance of social and digital platforms. At the same time, the continued use of traditional news sources demonstrates that established media organizations remain relevant.

5.3 Health information through newspapers

Newspapers can contribute to public-health communication by reporting on disease prevention, healthy lifestyles, healthcare services and emerging health concerns. Accurate health communication can support informed decision-making.

5.4 Educational information

Newspapers can supplement formal education by exposing readers to current affairs, science, technology, public policy and social issues. This function is particularly relevant in a highly literate state such as Kerala.

5.5 Environmental communication

Environmental reporting can increase awareness of pollution, climate change, biodiversity, waste management and conservation. Regional newspapers can contextualize such issues by connecting them with local communities.

5.6 Women's empowerment

Media representation can influence public awareness concerning women's education, employment, rights, leadership and social participation. Coverage of women's issues can contribute to broader discussion about gender equality.

6. RESEARCH GAP

A substantial amount of contemporary media research focuses on digital media, social networking and online news consumption. Comparatively less attention has been given to the continuing role of regional-language newspapers in promoting public awareness across multiple areas of social life.

There is a need for reader-based empirical research examining how regional newspaper audiences perceive:

- credibility;
- educational usefulness;
- health information;
- environmental reporting;
- women's empowerment;
- civic responsibility; and
- community-related communication.

The present study addresses this gap by examining readers' perceptions of Deepika Newspaper in Kerala.

7. AIM

To assess readers' perceptions regarding the role of Deepika Newspaper in promoting public awareness and socially relevant communication in Kerala.

8. OBJECTIVES

1. To assess the readership pattern of Deepika Newspaper among selected readers.
2. To determine readers' perceptions regarding the credibility of Deepika Newspaper.
3. To assess readers' perceptions regarding the newspaper's educational contribution.
4. To determine its perceived contribution to health awareness.
5. To assess its perceived contribution to environmental awareness.
6. To determine its perceived role in women's empowerment.
7. To assess readers' overall satisfaction with the newspaper.
8. To determine the relationship between readership characteristics and perceived social contribution.
9. To identify predictors of readers' overall perception of the newspaper's social contribution.

9. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the readership characteristics of Deepika Newspaper readers?
2. How do readers perceive the credibility of the newspaper?
3. How do readers perceive its educational and health-related information?
4. How do readers perceive its contribution to environmental and women's issues?
5. Is readership frequency associated with perceived social contribution?
6. Which newspaper-related factors best predict readers' overall perception?

10. METHODOLOGY

Research approach

A quantitative research approach was adopted.

Research design

A descriptive cross-sectional design was used.

Study population

The study population consisted of regular readers of Deepika Newspaper in Kerala.

Sample

The study included **300 respondents**.

Sampling technique

Convenience sampling was adopted.

Inclusion criteria

Participants were:

- aged 18 years or above;
- regular readers of Deepika Newspaper;
- able to understand the questionnaire; and
- willing to participate.

11. DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT

The instrument consisted of two sections.

Section A: Sociodemographic and readership variables

The questionnaire included information regarding:

- age;
- gender;
- education;
- occupation;
- income;
- district;
- duration of readership; and

- frequency of newspaper reading.

Section B: Reader Perception Scale

A 40-item five-point Likert scale was used to assess readers' perceptions.

The major domains were:

Domain	Number of items
Credibility and reliability	6
Educational contribution	6
Health awareness	5
Environmental awareness	5
Women's empowerment	5
Civic responsibility	5
Community development	4
Overall satisfaction	4
Total	40

The response options ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

The instrument demonstrated high internal consistency, with **Cronbach's alpha = .91**.

12. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Participation was voluntary. Participants were informed regarding the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained during data collection and analysis.

13. RESULTS

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	162	54.0
Female	138	46.0
Total	300	100.0

Table 1. Gender distribution

The sample consisted of 54% male and 46% female respondents.

Reading frequency	Frequency	Percentage
Daily	221	73.7
Weekly	49	16.3
Occasionally	30	10.0
Total	300	100.0

Table 2. Frequency of newspaper reading

A substantial majority (73.7%) reported daily readership, indicating a high level of regular engagement with the newspaper.

14. PERCEIVED CREDIBILITY

Indicator	Mean
Accuracy of reporting	4.48
Balanced editorials	4.37
Reliability	4.34
Ethical journalism	4.29
Unbiased reporting	4.18
Timely reporting	4.11
Overall mean	4.30 ± 0.68

Table 3. Readers' perception regarding newspaper credibility

The overall credibility score of **4.30 ± 0.68** indicates a highly favourable perception among respondents.

Accuracy received the highest mean score (4.48), whereas timely reporting obtained the lowest mean score (4.11), although it remained favourable.

15. EDUCATIONAL CONTRIBUTION

The overall mean score for the educational contribution of Deepika Newspaper was:

4.37 ± 0.67

This was the highest among the major developmental domains assessed in the study.

The finding suggests that readers consider the newspaper a useful source of educational and knowledge-related information.

16. HEALTH AWARENESS

The overall mean score for health-related information was:

4.34 ± 0.68

The finding indicates that respondents viewed the newspaper favourably as a source of health awareness.

Health communication through regional newspapers may be especially useful because information can be presented in a familiar language and linked to locally relevant health concerns.

17. ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS

The overall mean score for environmental contribution was:

4.30 ± 0.72

The finding demonstrates a favourable reader perception regarding the newspaper's role in creating awareness of environmental issues.

Regional reporting can make environmental issues more meaningful by linking broad concerns with local experiences.

18. WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

The overall mean score for women's empowerment was:

4.31 ± 0.69

This indicates a favourable perception of the newspaper's contribution to women's empowerment and gender-related awareness.

Media reporting can contribute to social discussion regarding women's education, employment, leadership, rights and participation.

19. OVERALL SATISFACTION

Satisfaction level	Frequency	Percentage
Highly satisfied	148	49.3
Satisfied	122	40.7
Neutral	18	6.0
Dissatisfied	8	2.7
Highly dissatisfied	4	1.3
Total	300	100.0

Table 4. Satisfaction with Deepika Newspaper

Overall, **90.0%** of respondents were either satisfied or highly satisfied with Deepika Newspaper.

This high level of satisfaction supports the generally favourable perception observed across the major domains.

20. CORRELATION ANALYSIS

Variable	Correlation coefficient	Significance
Reading frequency	$r = .612$	$p < .001$
Newspaper credibility	$r = .724$	$p < .001$
Educational contribution	$r = .681$	$p < .001$
Health awareness	$r = .646$	$p < .001$
Environmental awareness	$r = .658$	$p < .001$

Table 5. Relationship between selected readership factors and perceived social contribution

The findings demonstrate positive and statistically significant relationships between the selected factors and overall perceived social contribution.

Credibility showed the strongest association ($r = .724$, $p < .001$).

21. MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS

Predictor	Standardized β
Newspaper credibility	.352
Educational contribution	.241
Health awareness	.187
Environmental awareness	.146
Women's empowerment	.121

$$R^2 = .716$$

Table 6. Predictors of perceived social contribution

The regression model explained **71.6% of the variance** in perceived social contribution.

Newspaper credibility was the strongest predictor ($\beta = .352$), followed by educational contribution ($\beta = .241$), health awareness ($\beta = .187$), environmental awareness ($\beta = .146$) and women's empowerment ($\beta = .121$).

22. DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that Deepika Newspaper continues to be perceived favourably by its readers across several socially relevant dimensions.

The most important finding is the high perception of credibility. The overall credibility mean of 4.30 indicates that readers generally regard the newspaper as accurate, reliable and ethically responsible. Accuracy received the highest score, suggesting that readers place particular value on trustworthy information.

This finding is important within the contemporary information environment. Audiences today receive information from numerous sources, including social media, messaging platforms and online news. The increased availability of information also increases the possibility of misinformation. In such an environment, credibility becomes a central characteristic of professional journalism.

The educational contribution obtained a mean of 4.37, demonstrating that readers consider Deepika a useful source of knowledge. Newspapers can support

lifelong learning by providing information beyond the formal classroom.

Health awareness also received a high mean score of 4.34. This suggests that readers recognize the newspaper's potential role in communicating health information. Health journalism can contribute to awareness of preventive practices, common diseases, healthcare services and healthy lifestyles.

Environmental awareness recorded a mean of 4.30. Environmental sustainability requires informed communities, and regional journalism can help connect broader environmental concerns with local experiences.

Women's empowerment recorded a mean of 4.31. This finding indicates that respondents recognize the relevance of newspaper coverage to women's social participation and empowerment.

The high overall satisfaction rate is another significant finding. Nine out of ten participants were satisfied or highly satisfied with the newspaper. This supports the overall positive perception of the publication among the study participants.

The correlation findings further demonstrate that reading frequency, credibility, education, health and environmental information were significantly related to the perceived social contribution of the newspaper.

The strongest association was found with credibility. This suggests that the perceived social value of information may depend substantially on whether readers trust the source providing it.

The regression findings provide additional support. The selected variables collectively explained 71.6% of the variance in perceived social contribution. Credibility emerged as the strongest predictor.

This finding provides an important implication for regional journalism: socially relevant content alone may not be sufficient; the information must also be perceived as accurate, balanced and trustworthy.

23. INTERPRETATION FROM A COMMUNICATION PERSPECTIVE

The findings can be understood through the concept of media credibility.

Readers are more likely to consider information useful when they perceive the source as trustworthy. Therefore, credibility may act as an important foundation for the communication of educational, health, environmental and social information.

The findings also support the continuing relevance of regional-language journalism.

Although digital media provide rapid access to information, regional newspapers have the capacity to:

- contextualize information;
- provide detailed reporting;
- communicate in a familiar language;
- focus on local issues;
- highlight community concerns; and
- provide continuity and institutional credibility.

Therefore, traditional print media should not necessarily be understood as competing with digital media. Instead, they can complement digital communication through verified and contextualized reporting.

24. IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Although the present paper does not use sustainable development as its primary outcome variable, the findings have implications for several areas of social development.

Education

Newspaper-based information can supplement formal education and promote lifelong learning.

Health

Reliable health reporting can strengthen public awareness and support preventive health behaviour.

Environment

Environmental reporting can encourage awareness of conservation and sustainable practices.

Gender equality

Coverage concerning women can contribute to awareness of equality, rights and participation.

Civic participation

Information about governance and community affairs can support informed citizenship.

Thus, regional journalism can contribute indirectly to the social information environment required for sustainable communities.

25. STRENGTHS OF THE STUDY

1. The study included 300 respondents.
2. It examined a regional-language newspaper.
3. Multiple dimensions of public awareness were assessed.
4. The perception instrument demonstrated high internal consistency ($\alpha = .91$).
5. Both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were used.
6. The study provides reader-based evidence regarding the contemporary relevance of regional print journalism.

26. LIMITATIONS

The findings should be interpreted in view of the following limitations:

1. Convenience sampling was used.
2. The study was conducted among readers of one newspaper.
3. The cross-sectional design prevents causal interpretation.
4. Data were based on self-reported perceptions.
5. The study did not compare Deepika readers with readers of other newspapers.
6. Actual behavioural changes resulting from newspaper exposure were not measured.
7. The study did not independently conduct content analysis of the newspaper.

27. RECOMMENDATIONS

Future studies may:

1. Compare multiple Malayalam newspapers.
2. Compare print and digital readers.
3. Conduct longitudinal studies.
4. Examine actual behavioural outcomes associated with newspaper exposure.
5. Conduct content analysis of educational, health and environmental reporting.
6. Examine youth readership.
7. Study rural and urban readership separately.
8. Explore the relationship between media literacy and newspaper credibility.
9. Conduct qualitative interviews with readers and journalists.
10. Examine the role of regional newspapers during public-health emergencies, environmental crises and social campaigns.

CONCLUSION

The present study demonstrates that Deepika Newspaper is perceived by its readers as a credible and socially useful source of information. High scores were observed for credibility, education, health awareness, environmental information and women's empowerment. The high overall satisfaction level further indicates the continuing relevance of the newspaper among its regular readers.

The strongest statistical relationship was observed between credibility and perceived social contribution. The regression model further indicated that credibility, education, health, environmental information and women's empowerment collectively explained a substantial proportion of the variance in readers' perceptions.

The findings suggest that regional print journalism continues to have an important role in public awareness and community-oriented communication in Kerala, even within a rapidly changing digital media environment.

However, the findings should be interpreted as evidence of readers' perceptions and associations rather than direct causal effects. Future research using comparative, longitudinal and mixed-method approaches can provide stronger evidence regarding the relationship between regional journalism, public awareness and measurable social outcomes.

REFERENCES

1. Baran, S. J., & Davis, D. K. (2021). *Mass communication theory: Foundations, ferment, and future* (8th ed.). Cengage.
2. McCombs, M. E. (2014). *Setting the agenda: Mass media and public opinion* (2nd ed.). Polity Press.
3. McCombs, M. E., & Shaw, D. L. (1972). The agenda-setting function of mass media. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36(2), 176–187.
4. Melkote, S. R., & Steeves, H. L. (2015). *Communication for development: Theory and practice for empowerment and social justice* (3rd ed.). SAGE.
5. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. (2024). *Digital News Report 2024*. University of Oxford.
6. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. (2024). India. In *Digital News Report 2024*. University of Oxford.
7. UNESCO. (2023). *Global education monitoring report 2023: Technology in education: A tool on whose terms?* UNESCO.
8. United Nations. (2015). *Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. United Nations.
9. United Nations. (2023). *The Sustainable Development Goals report 2023*. United Nations.
10. United Nations. (2024). *The Sustainable Development Goals report 2024*. United Nations.
11. Wardle, C., & Derakhshan, H. (2017). *Information disorder: Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policy making*. Council of Europe.
12. Zelizer, B. (2019). *Journalism and the discourse of trust*. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication.

HOW TO CITE: Roy K. Sebastian^{1*}, Prachi Chaturvedi², Regional Print Journalism And Public Awareness In Kerala: A Reader-Based Assessment Of Deepika Newspaper, *Int. J. Sci. R. Tech.*, 2026, 3 (8), 66-75. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21773583>