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## **Mapping Right to Information in Print: Critical Study of *Times of India and Hindustan Times***

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### **Abstract**

This paper presents framing analysis of media coverage focusing on representations of RTI stories related to transparency, governance, services and accountability from 2005–2015. The main sources of material for this research are Times of India (TOI) and Hindustan Times (HT), the two most widely-read English newspapers in India. The analysis adopts the contextual constructivism function of the mass media. The results show that the amount of newspaper content on RTI has increased during the last ten years. RTI stories were highlighted most during 2011 when the then United Progressive Alliance Government was questioned the most on grounds of corruption. The decadal analysis of the RTI stories shows that in these two newspapers the most frequent theme was corruption (15% of articles), with the second most dominant theme related to accountability (11%). 62% of articles were related to events that were positive, compared with 21% that were negative for RTI objectives. The findings of this study recommends that there is a need to constantly monitor the grass root situation of the usage of RTI Act and also to bridge the gap between the urban and the rural masses.

**Keywords:** Framing Analysis, Media, Newspapers, Right to Information Act

After a decade of the implementation of the Right to Information (RTI) Act, it is necessary to examine the prominence this act has got in media and whether media has played its role of disseminator, educator and awareness generator while reporting stories related to RTI Act. Most of the newspapers however report RTI stories in an episodic way, but on completion of ten years of this law some thematic stories were also reported.

One such article published in *Hindustan Times* (HT) on October 16, 2015 is worth mentioning here. The article titled “A decade of RTI: All you need to know about the game changing law” explains briefly what this act is, how it can be used and how it’s being used. This article emphasizes that empowering public authorities to give out information will make the process transparent (“A Decade of RTI,” 2015). Another article published in *Times of India* (TOI) analyzes the ten years of RTI Act in terms of number of users. The article titled “Only 0.41 per cent of Indians seek information under RTI Act: Study” (N. Sharma, 2015) mentions the key findings of the study conducted by Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative which revealed that not even 0.5 per cent of India's population sought information under the RTI Act in 2014. However, the absolute number of RTI applications is increasing year by year.

The study also focuses on the micro trends, which point to a male-female and rural-urban divide among different states. Data from different states are analysed. The study revealed that only Chhattisgarh captured the urban-rural break-up of RTI applicants. Though the number of applicants increased by 21 percent in Chhattisgarh in 2014 the ratio of rural applicant had in fact reduced. In 2014 less than 20 percent rural applicants sought information through RTI. The study also confirmed that more men file RTI applications than women. The gender wise break up was captured only in Chhattisgarh and Nagaland. “In Chhattisgarh, women constituted 6.9 per cent of the RTI applicants

while in Nagaland they comprise 2.53 per cent of the RTI applicants," (Choudhary et al., 2015) says the study. Further, analysis of socio-economic background of applicants indicates an increase in applicants from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Chhattisgarh, the only state which has captured the indicative trend, shows that RTI applicants belonging to Scheduled Castes nearly doubled in 2014. There was over 40% increase in RTI applicants from Scheduled Tribes in 2014 from that of 2013.

In an article titled "RTI empowers the citizen, but threats can make Act opaque" published in English daily *Hindustan Times*, former Central Information Commissioner, Shailesh Gandhi (2015), asserts that after a decade of the implementation of the RTI Act, it is necessary to reflect on some of its key achievements and the threats it faces. On the achievement side he says that the act has spread across the country, and there is no district that has not received RTI applications and the act has empowered the ordinary citizen to get respect as an individual from the government and its officials. On the threat side he observes that the performance of information commissions has been largely unsatisfactory as they have delayed the decisions and hence have failed to prove their accountability.

### **Context and relevance of the study**

The Right to Information is now an internationally protected right. It is protected by United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and by the Commonwealth. Prior to 1989 there were only a dozen countries in the world which provided its citizen with the Right to Information. This number increased to 103 in the next decade. Now, majority of the United Nations member states have recognized freedom of information. As a result, transparency and accountability have gradually become the norm rather than the exception. Now the Governments are also bound to ensure that their offices are properly staffed, funded, trained and equipped to facilitate citizens' access to official information. The departments are bound by the law to voluntarily disclose key information related to their funding, expenditure, and overall

functioning. Every public office has a designated Public Information Officer (PIO).

RTI campaign in India began in the early 1990s. The Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) started the movement in rural areas of Rajasthan, the western state of India. The campaign was for land, minimum wages and delivery of basic services to the poor. In 1996, Prabhsh Joshi, the renowned Indian journalist came forward to support the cause of MKSS and popularized the slogan “Hum Jaanenge, Hum Jeeyenge” (We will Know, We will Live). Following Prabhsh Joshi, other journalists also came in support of this movement. Not only journalists but eminent bureaucrats like S. R. Sankaran, Harsh Mander, and N. C. Saxena also demonstrated their contribution.

Prominent individuals and organizations in the National Campaign for People’s Right to Information were joined by a growing number of RTI advocates in many states, campaigning for strong legislation and implementation at the state and national levels.

In this ongoing struggle for making the Indian State accountable to its citizens, the role and contribution of many prominent individuals like Aruna Roy, Shekhar Singh, Nikhil Dey, Anna Hazare, Maja Daruwallah, Shailesh Gandhi and Anjali Bhardwaj are well known. However, much less acknowledged is the collective role of many unnamed individuals and groups who have enabled this fundamental change.

The development of RTI as a part of the constitutional law of India started with petitions of the press to the Supreme Court for enforcement of certain logistical implications of the right to freedom of speech and expression such as challenging governmental orders for control of newsprint, bans on distribution of papers, etc. It was through these cases that the concept of the public’s right to know developed.

The landmark case was *Bennett Coleman & Co. vs. Union of India* in which the petitioners, a publishing house bringing out the most read newspaper in India, the *Times of India*, challenged the government’s

newsprint policy which put restrictions on acquisition, sale and consumption of newsprint. The court struck down the newsprint control order saying that it directly affected the Petitioner's right to freely publish and circulate their paper. In that, it violated their right to freedom of speech and expression. The judges also remarked that freedom of speech and expression includes within its compass the right of all citizens to read and be informed.

In India, like other countries which have adopted Freedom of Information legislations, PIOs are responsible for processing and responding to RTI queries. Modern RTI legislation also incorporates provisions ensuring quick, inexpensive and all-inclusive access to official information. In India it includes timely response to an information request and the release of requested information at minimal costs.

Media advocacy has played an important role in effective RTI legislation and its implementation. Media in India has advocated for publicly disseminating information on the provisions of RTI laws, the procedures for exercising RTI, and key developments within the RTI movement. When various movements joined hands and formed National Campaign for Peoples' Right to Information in 1996, the media took up the issue of RTI in a more serious way. The Indian media generated necessary pressure on the government and parliamentarians to pass the historic RTI Act 2005.

After the passage of the Act in 2005 the Indian media, particularly the newspapers, covered RTI related issues which greatly impacted levels of public awareness. This resulted in the exponential growth of RTI applications every year. For the clarity of the arguments it is important to note that as per RTI Act, one can file a request seeking information to any public funded office. The maximum period to reply an RTI application is 45 days. Media houses launched a nationwide campaign on RTI to build public awareness. This encouraged a large number of people not to pay bribes and ask for information from the government officials under the RTI Act. "Drive against Bribes" was one such campaign which accompanied media partners and civil society

members from across the country. Another such initiative was made by *News Express*, another newspaper, which joined hands with Parivartan, an NGO in guiding people how to exercise the RTI. This express initiative got wide recognition in the country.

Since the enactment of RTI Act in India, the number of RTI applications has increased exponentially from 100000 queries per month in 2007 to a million applications a month in 2013. RTI also proved useful and instrumental in unearthing large scams in India. RTI queries have been instrumental in unearthing Mumbai's Adarsh Housing Society scam, which led to the sacking of a chief minister; the scandalous Maharashtra irrigation scam; Delhi's Commonwealth Games scam, Assam's public distribution system scam and Madhya Pradesh's recruitment scam.

Indian media has proved very instrumental in bringing the issues and scams unearthed using the RTI Act. This paper analyses all the contents of two leading newspapers of India from 2005 to 2015 to provide a clear image of how RTI issues have been covered and which issues got prominence. This study will prove beneficial not only to the RTI activists and civil society members but also to media researchers. This decadal trend also provides an account of frames used in newspaper coverage of RTI issues which gives an insight into the way RTI issues are highlighted in media. All over the world media researchers are engaged in making assessment of the impact of intervention on big issues. This study will guide policy makers and media professionals on how they have been putting the things till now, and what they need to do in future for better implementation of the act and useful dissemination of information.

### **Objective of the Right to Information Act:**

The basic aim of RTI Act is to empower the citizens. The act also intends to promote transparency and accountability in the working of the Government, contain corruption, and make our democracy work for the people in real sense.

Addressing a convention on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of RTI Act, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said, “The process of accessing information should be transparent, timely and trouble-free. Delayed information does not help solve the problem but increases it. Timely information can halt a wrong decision, we will emphasize this” (“RTI replies,” 2015).

## **Media and Right to Information**

Media occupies a critical place in the governance process. The crucial part is its role of a gatekeeper; disseminating critical messages to the public and highlighting issues, concerns, and initiatives. The prime objective of RTI to usher in a practical regime of right to information cannot be attained without a proactive role played by a disseminator, educator, awareness generator that is the media. In the context of RTI implementation, journalists have to play a dual role – as RTI activists and observers – scrutinizing the implementation of the law in rural and urban areas. Media thus plays a crucial role in building an inclusive information society by its sheer reach and opinion building power.

The role of media organizations assumes considerable importance in realizing the objectives of RTI Act. The media can not only play an important role in monitoring public service delivery by invoking provisions under act, but can also facilitate in generating awareness and capacity building on RTI among the community. Thus, media performs an important role in the governance process by acting as a bridge between the community and public agencies.

RTI Act has become a major tool for journalists seeking to uncover information about how people are governed. The act is a key component of an enabling environment for the news media, which are undermined if they cannot access government-held information. Conversely, even with RTI, public right to know cannot be effective without an independent, free press to disseminate information.

So, mere adoption of RTI legislation does not necessarily promote freedom of expression and freedom of the press. Hence the role of press becomes important because news media plays an important part in

advocating RTI laws. Besides journalists themselves, the positions of media outlet owners toward RTI, and the level of ownership independence and concentration are pivotal. If media houses are strongly linked to government and the latter opposes broadening of RTI horizon, then owners of media houses are unlikely to support it, or to allow publishing of stories based on RTI requests that negatively portray government. Conversely, owners of more independent media houses may encourage journalists to support such act and use of it.

## **Review of Literature**

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations states: “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.” Media in the Plan of Action (C.9) states that “The media have an essential role in the development of the Information Society and are recognized as an important contributor to freedom of expression and plurality of information” (WSIS, 2003).

Thompson (1995) has made similar view and stated that means of communication create new ways of acting and interacting socially, new types of relationships, and new ways of presenting ourselves. He asserted that we are passing from face to face dialogue to asymmetrical mass media communication.

Besley and Burgess (2002) has viewed that having a more informed and politically active electorate strengthens incentives for governments to be accountable. This suggests that there is a role for both democratic institutions and mass media in ensuring that preferences of citizens are reflected in policy.

Natharius (2004) has a more critical view on freedom of information and media. He has argued that the role of visual perception is supreme in media literacy. This is truer in present times as majority of information is transmitted using visual forms of mass media such as Television, Films and Internet. This has also led to the shift from a linear perceptual process to a holistic perceptual process. Natharius



(2004) deduces that “media-literate individual must be educated in the processes of visual perception and how the media use the visual channels to transmit, and often distort, information. The more we know the more we see as well as the next most important axiom: What is not seen is as important as what is seen.”

In Maciejewski and Ozar’s (2005) opinion Right to Know has multiple meanings associated with it. The concept is closely associated with moral thinking, including a discussion of the moral elements of rights. Its meaning varies in specific journalistic situations.

Richardson (2004) notes that the public’s right to know is a dangerous notion because an unfettered right to know would result in restrictions on the press’s right to determine what to publish.

Studying RTI in India as a case for empowering people, Ashraf (2008) suggests that in the era where numerous administrative agencies have expanded exponentially RTI plays vital role in equipping people to make informed choices. He argues that RTI has emerged as a powerful tool for the poor and underprivileged in India. Adding to this Subramanian and Saxena (2008) in their study express the need of enhancement of IT enabled e-governance in India to achieve a more efficient, transparent, speedy, and corruption free service delivery system.

Roberts (2010) gives an account of first four years of RTI law in India. He finds that however Indian citizens have filed about two million RTI requests for information during its first two and half years, the use of the law is constrained by uneven public awareness, poor public planning, and bureaucratic indifference or outright hostility.

Webb (2010) has studied the success stories of RTI activists in north India and analysed the narratives tailored by activists. He found that reproducing and presenting the success stories helps to show influential movement sympathisers and policy-makers that the movement is socially diverse and that ordinary people are participating. The conscious use of rhetoric is part of building a sense of belonging to particular groups or to the wider movement. A study conducted by Rupley, Brown and Marshall (2012) has similar observation. The study

suggests that there is a need of examining the relation between specific aspects of governance and media coverage. And, results from longitudinal analyses indicate that the quality of disclosures increases over time. But, Fisk (2013) further elaborates the problem and observes that all disclosure statutes are not created equally.

The effectiveness of media advocacy depends on how frequently and in which tone the issues have been raised and followed. Chitra and Neelamalar (2013) while studying the effectiveness of print technologies in bringing social change through RTI Act observed that newspapers had only around 0.16% of articles related to RTI. This study had taken into account the articles published in a single month. Relly and Scwalbe (2013) content-analyzed 221 articles published in three Indian Newspapers and found that more than 80% of RTI related articles referred to corruption and these articles had a brief mention of RTI Act. The English-language dailies reported their own use of RTI to expose corruption in 2% of the articles.

In a recent study P. Sharma (2015) observes that RTI has brought in a palpable sense of empowerment in the lives of many ordinary Indians. However, he warns that just having information using RTI is not enough and for a viable social change we need to act and think beyond rights and legislation. Not only the means of communication has to be meaningful, the act has also to be meaningful according to Pamela Philipose (2015).

Fattah (2016) argues that merely enacting a right like RTI is not enough to ensure citizens' access to information. This study asserts that infomediaries are essential and in Bangladesh infomediaries have played significant role in increasing the number of RTI users and this intervention in Bangladesh increased the number of women RTI users than in non-intervention areas.

### **Objective of the Study:**

1. To provide an empirical assessment of prominence given to RTI related stories in the leading Indian newspapers in the last ten years.
2. To provide an account of type of content, theme and tone of newspaper coverage on RTI related issues in the last ten years.

## **Hypothesis:**

H1: The last ten year has witnessed constant increase in the number of articles on RTI related issues in the leading newspapers of India.

H2: The RTI articles have been placed on reader friendly pages in the leading newspapers.

H3: The tone of articles related to RTI has remained mostly positive towards the basic objectives of the Act.

H4: The articles related to RTI predominantly have thematic frames.

## **METHODS**

### **Sample**

Study sample comprised of two leading national English-language dailies – *Hindustan Times* (HT) and *Times of India* (TOI) from 2005-2015.

- 1). Articles were obtained from a media monitoring company that provided all clippings of news coverage featuring the words “RTI”, “Right to Information”, “RTI Act”
- 2). For an article to be included in the study it had to be at least five hundred words long and contain at least one full paragraph focused on RTI, plus at least one other mention of RTI.
- 3). This search strategy yielded  $4566+8944 = 13510$  articles over the period of ten years from 2005-2015. These articles are likely to represent most of the RTI related news coverage found in national newspapers in India during this period.

### **Coding variables**

There were three key types of variable coded: prominence, content, and tone. Prominence was assessed depending on whether the article appeared on the first page or on the reader friendly pages. Content was assessed in terms of six RTI related themes (Accountability, Governance, Corruption, Personal Grievances, beneficiaries and whistle

blowing). Tone variables included: positive, negative or neutral for RTI related objectives. These coding variables enabled to establish how often RTI related articles appeared in the news, how prominent they were, the type of articles in which they appeared, the main content areas or themes of the news items, and the “tone” of the news items relative to RTI objectives. In addition to this the frequency of RTI related articles in each of the three newspapers was also calculated.

### **Coding procedures and analysis**

Coding procedures were developed over an extended period. Articles on RTI related issues from 2005 to 2015 were coded by one of two authors. To assess inter-coder reliability, 20 articles per month were randomly chosen and coded by both coders. The median value of  $\kappa$  (Cohen’s  $\kappa$  index) was 0.86 (range 0.73 to 0.97). Therefore, an acceptable level of agreement between coders was established. Additional significance testing was not carried out because the newspaper articles in this study represent a census rather than a sample of the population of articles.

### **Findings:**

#### **Characteristics and prominence of coverage**

Over the course of the last ten years, i.e. from October 2005 to October 2015, 13510 RTI focused articles were published in two leading national newspapers of India. This represents, as shown in Table1, an average of 112 articles per month, or just over three articles a day. Of these, 37% were published on pages other than the front page and 30.54% in special section. Newspaper coverage of RTI issues also included 407 letters to the editor and 403 editorials representing 3.01% and 3.13 % of total coverage respectively.

Table 1. Cross tabulation of RTI stories by newspaper section and main focus

		Focus of Title						Total
		Accountability	Governance/ Administration	Corruption	Personal Grievances	Beneficiaries/ Success stories	Whistleblowers /Exposes/ Threats	
Front page	Count	31	67	783	567	889	1143	3480
	% of total	2	3.5	38.6	18.24	34.63	46.99	25.75
Other pages	Count	843	711	586	1289	753	881	5063
	% of total	56	37.6	28.9	41.48	29.33	36.22	37.47
Editorial	Count	46	53	113	49	83	79	423
	% of total	3	2.8	5.6	1.57	3.23	3.24	3.13
Letter to the editor	Count	43	46	89	61	116	52	407
	% of total	2.8	2.4	4.3	1.96	4.51	2.13	3.01
Special Section	Count	523	1004	456	1141	726	277	4127
	% of total	35	53	22	36.72	28.28	11.38	30.54
Total	Count	1486	1891	2027	3107	2567	2432	13510
	% of total	11	14	15	23	19	18	100

## Volume of Articles

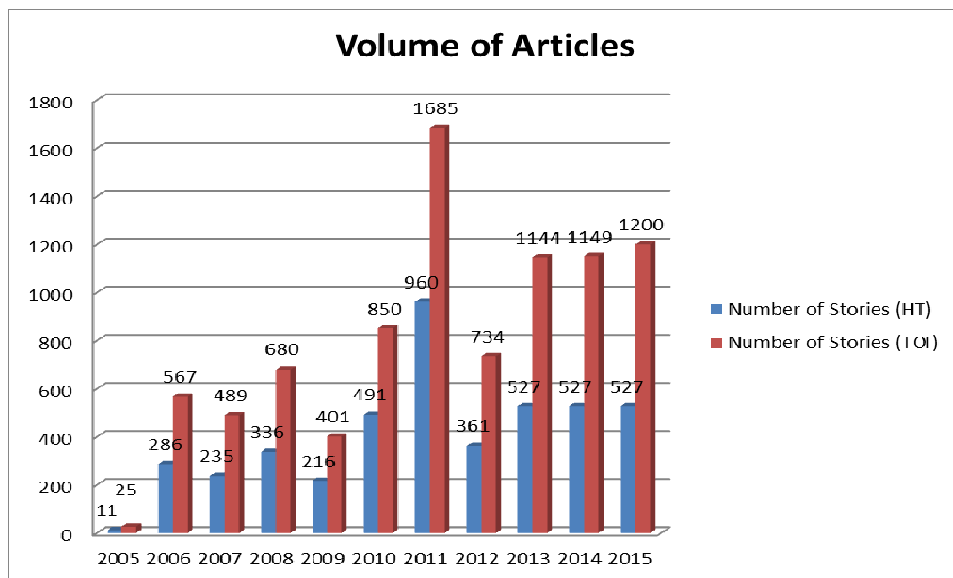


Figure 1. Year wise amount of coverage of RTI Stories in HT and TOI

However, there was considerable variation in the volume of coverage (as can be seen in Fig. 1) each year from a peak of  $960+1685 = 2645$  in 2011 to a low of  $11+25 = 36$  in 2005. Still, the volume of articles fluctuated over the period – the general trend was that the number of RTI related stories increased. As RTI Act came into effect in the last quarter of 2005, it won't be apt to compare the figures of 2005 with the full years. Even if the number of stories published in 2006 or 2007 is compared with year 2014 or 2015, it's clear that the volume has increased significantly. So, hypothesis no.1 is accepted.

Table 2. Coverage of RTI stories on episodic and thematic frames

Type of frame		HT	TOI	HT+TOI
Episodic	Count	3607	7423	11030
	% of total	79	83	81.64
Thematic	Count	959	1521	2480
	% of total	21	17	18.35
Total		4566	8944	13510

News stories related to personal grievances of RTI users, as shown in Table 2, includes 23% of all the stories. These grievances included pay and pension related queries, transfer and posting related queries and grievances related to delay in rendering public services. Success stories of RTI beneficiaries accounted for 19% of all the stories. These success stories were somehow related to personal and community grievances only, but the reply of such queries benefited the RTI user or the community directly. 18% of all the stories reported in both the newspapers were related to whistle blowers, RTI Activists and new disclosures made using RTI Act; 15% of the stories reported corruption in Government and local bodies; 14% of the stories were related to loopholes in administration and governance; and 11% stories questioned the accountability of Government and local administration. Of all the stories 25.75% were reported on the front page and among the front page stories those related to whistleblowers and new disclosures were prominent, comprising 46.9% of front page stories, followed by 38.6% stories related to general corruption in government, administration and local bodies. The findings reveal that RTI stories have not been placed prominently on reader friendly pages. Therefore, hypothesis no. 2 is rejected.

## Tone of coverage

This study coded the tone of RTI related stories in order to evaluate the nature of the event being covered and the opinion being expressed by the author relative to fundamental objectives of the RTI Act. Majority of the articles as shown in Figure 2 (61.99%) reported on events that were positive for fundamental objectives of RTI such as transparency, accountability, anti-corruption initiatives, etc. However, around 21% of RTI related stories represented coverage of events that were negative for RTI objectives, and were more often contained in articles with themes of poor governance, corruption in government bodies, threats to whistle blowers, etc. The remaining articles were coded as having neutral (17%) impact on right to information related objectives. The findings reveal that the coverage has remained mostly positive and therefore hypothesis no. 3 is accepted.

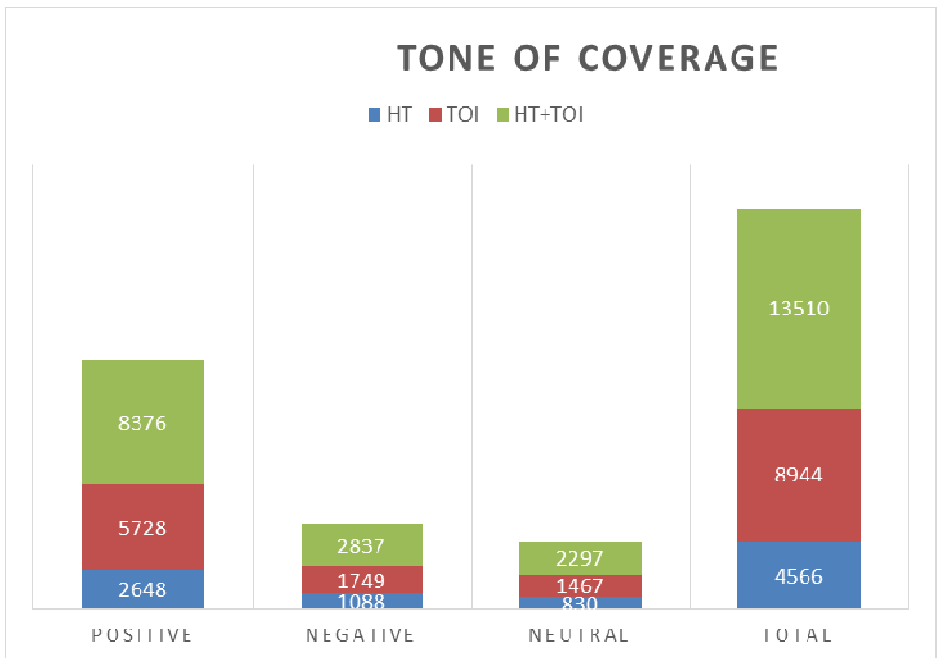


Figure 2. Tone of coverage towards RTI related stories

## Type of frame

As far as type of frame used in RTI related articles is concerned, the content analysis based on coding of stories on episodic and thematic frames (Table 2) found 81.64% of all the stories being reported in episodic frame and only 18.35 percent coverage in thematic frame. This means that newspapers were hardly concerned with educating the readers on RTI issues, their main concern was to create sensation through the information gathered using RTI. These findings suggest that thematic frames were not given prominence, and hence hypothesis no. 4 is rejected.

## Discussion

The results of this framing analysis provide a decadal upgrading of the only study to have systematically examined newspaper coverage of RTI issues in Indian press. The total volume of articles (Fig. 1.) reflects an ongoing presence of RTI issues in the news, with an average of over twelve articles a day. The fluctuation in coverage of RTI issues was, however, substantial during this period. This suggests either that there were peaks and troughs in RTI related queries, or that the newsworthiness of some issues resulted in such fluctuations. One particular fluctuation can clearly be seen in the year 2011, when the large number of corruption related stories was published and the revelations were made signed Right to Information Act. Overall, 2645 newspaper articles relating to RTI appeared in 2011 and most of them were stories on corruption. The relatively high volume of articles in 2011 can also be related to specific scams. In 2011, India's telecom scandal (2G scam) clinched the second spot in *Time Magazine's* "Top 10 Abuses of Power" list, bested only by Watergate. *Times of India* and *Hindustan Times* followed this story regularly and almost every day it carried stories related to this scam.

Coverage of issues related to transparency, accountability, successful RTI users, scams and corruption revealed using RTI and threat to life of whistle blowers were prominent in almost all the years since 2006 (Table 1). The newspapers consistently covered the programs reflecting ongoing development of RTI related issues and



trials including yearly seminar organized in the month of October. The newspapers published articles related to yearly, five yearly and decadal review of the act.

One such article published in *Times of India* on October 29, 2015 critically examined the ten years of RTI as “10 years after RTI act, info under lock & key.” This article compares the state of national RTI act with status of RTI act in Tamil Nadu as it was the first state in India to enact transparency law. The story in *Times of India* narrated the ten years in terms of victory of good over evil – “when the country celebrated Vijayadashami to mark the symbolic triumph of good over evil, a potent tool to empower citizens and expose the often accepted sordid business of governance came into being. Ten years later, the Right to Information Act has become a whistleblower's weapon as it seeks, though at times in theory, to bring to the light dealings in government departments otherwise shrouded in secrecy” (Philip, 2015).

The same day *Hindustan Times* published an article with the title “RTI empowers the citizen, but threats can make Act opaque.” This article by former Chief Information Commissioner Shailesh Gandhi (2015) provides an account of key achievements of the act and potential threats to this act. The most disturbing aspect in Shailesh Gandhi's view is the judiciary's approach to transparency – “the Supreme Court had declared that it is a fundamental right flowing from Article 19 (1) (a) of the Constitution, before the advent of the RTI Act in many landmark judgments. In the last five years it appears that the decisions of various courts are expanding the grounds on which information can be denied” (Gandhi, 2015). Out of 16 apex court judgments analyzed by Gandhi, only one gave an order to furnish information. This judgment had the following statement: “The Act should not be allowed to be misused or abused, to become a tool to obstruct the national development and integration, or to destroy the peace, tranquility and harmony among its citizens. Nor should it be converted into a tool of oppression or intimidation of honest officials striving to do their duty” (Gandhi, 2015). The writer alleges that many judgments are expanding the exemptions, in a manner which is not in consonance with the law or the Constitution. Shailesh Gandhi concludes this article with a positive remark – “there is a possibility of a true democracy which can lead to

good governance and respect for the citizen. Citizens must continue their efforts at spreading the usage and spirit of the RTI, and also to counter the threats. If citizens want a better future and governance they will have to take this responsibility” (Gandhi, 2015).

Nearly 62 percent stories published in *Times of India* and *Hindustan Times* in the last ten years had positive slant towards the objectives of RTI Act. The style of reporting and presentation of the facts were of course different but the ultimate aim of such articles was to promote transparency and accountability in governance.

Sanjoy Narayan, in his one of the articles (“A decade of RTI,” 2015) provided an account of how the law was enacted and how crucial it has proved so far for the citizens in exercising their democratic rights. The article elaborates on how one can use this act and who is responsible for providing the information to the citizen –“under RTI any citizen can request, as her fundamental right, information from public authority, which is bound to reply speedily — within 30 days. Since its enactment in 2005, not only has the number of RTI applications soared — around 70 central government offices alone received an average of a million applications a month in 2013 compared to 100,000 a month in 2007 — but it has also been a law that has been instrumental in the unearthing of several scams and misdeeds involving hundreds of crores of rupees.”

Newspapers have time to time reported some interesting and useful stories on RTI. One such story was from Hyderabad (“Fogging kills mosquitoes,” 2013) titled “Fogging kills mosquitoes or harms humans?” In reply to this query filed by Syed Ali Hussaini, municipal authorities admitted that they have not done any study to check the effect of the chemicals used against mosquitoes on humans. What's more, it is not only one or two, but around 10 chemicals that are routinely being sprayed around houses and parks in the city. The reply shows that municipal authorities have been blindly following the procedure without knowing its consequences. Such stories create awareness among masses and motivate others to file queries using this act for the benefit of the community.

However, both the newspapers used the episodic frames dominantly while reporting RTI stories – time to time these newspapers provided systematic information about RTI as well. Altogether more than 80% of the stories used episodic frame and around 18.35% stories used thematic frames (Table 2). This indicates that there is need of increasing the stories based on thematic frames so that people can have better understanding of the act. This will help in bridging the gap and the country will have more empowered and informed citizenry.

### **Directions for further research**

This content analysis of newspaper coverage of RTI issues provides one important component of an overall evaluation of media advocacy efforts. Other methods that can contribute to a broader understanding of the subject include interviews with advocates and journalists, public opinion surveys, and the tracking of relevant policy changes. Perhaps most importantly, future research needs to examine the putative links between the presentation of issues in the media, individual use of media, and the way that news articles are perceived by the public.

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