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Stringers' News Reporting Responsibilities: Their Crucial Role in Journalism

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ABSTRACT: Press organizations employ correspondents and reporters who gather and report news with a fixed salary. In contrast, "stringers" work without a fixed salary, getting paid based on the amount of published news, measured in column centimeters known as "line account." Although not officially recognized by the press, stringers also referred to as news contributors or part-time workers, play indispensable role in gathering news, collecting advertisements, and contributing to newspaper circulation, acting as crucial but informal contributors to journalism. Stringers, as local news gatherers, build strong relationships within their region, earning high regard from the community due to their local residency, connections and commitment. With in-depth knowledge of unique characteristics and close ties with prominent figures, they convey local news with authenticity on societal issues, contributing to rational and scientifically aware reporting published in the "Districts Special" pages of the newspaper.

Stringer's, primary task is news collection, engage in diverse activities such as writing stories, conducting surveys, and performing case studies. For news collection, they gather information through various means, including obtaining press notes, relying on communication with local officials and residents, and holding monthly meetings for story assignments. In addition to surveys focusing on social welfare schemes and political leanings, Stringers excel in creating factual case studies that address individual experiences, providing valuable insights into grassroots issues for policy makers, government officials and the public at large.

Stringers, in some newspapers receive feedback and suggestions for improvement, often provided orally during news analysis sessions. Their performance is closely monitored, with evaluations based on the quantity and quality of submitted news items, and consistent mistakes may lead to reprimands or dismissal, especially in the significant district news coverage for major newspapers.

KEYWORDS: Stringer, Media, Journalist, Line account, Part timer, Survey, Case study, Date line.

I.INTRODUCTION

Press organizations have people called "correspondents" and "reporters" who gather news. Correspondents focus on specific places or topics, while reporters collect news from different sources on a particular beat or beats.



They turn this information into stories for the press. Both get a salary and their news is important to the press and sometimes also get bylines.

On the other hand, "**stringers**" work differently. They collect and send information but don't have a fixed salary. Instead, they get paid based on how much of their news gets published, measured in column centimeters, called "**line account**." Stringers aren't officially recognized by the press, and sometimes their news isn't given top priority. They also don't have appointment orders.

Besides "stringers," press organizations might call them other names like news contributors or part-time workers. Even without official recognition, these individuals, called stringers, play crucial role in journalism. Stringers do more than gather news; they also collect advertisements and increase newspaper circulation. They play many roles making them important contributors to newspapers, almost like informal workers.

Around 1980, when the Stringer system began, people who joined were often concerned about social, economic, political and cultural issues. In villages, problems like poverty, lack of drinking water, and socio-economic inequalities etc., were important. Stringers wanted to use newspapers to tell Government officials and political leaders about these problems and getting those issues addressed.

Since then, as the time progressed there is an increase in literacy rates in rural areas, leading to heightened competition among newspapers. The key objective for newspapers was to expand their readership, to increase advertising revenue and it became evident that this expansion could only be achieved by including news from even the most remote villages. Thus, there arose a need for Stringers at the village and mandal levels to high light local issues catering to the demands of village and regional news.

Dr K. Rajaram, Associate Professor, (EFLUniversity, Hyderabad) mentioned that the Stringer system gained momentum with the introduction of "district Editions." As the concept of having one reporter per mandal and one reporter per village emerged, the Stringer system was further developed and strengthened.

With the advent of the idea of featuring more local news, the hiring of Stringers increased. The growth of the satellite system also played a role in expanding the circulation of newspapers. The increase in the number of editions of Telugu newspapers further contributed to the expansion of the Stringer system.

Stringers function as news gatherers within their specific regions, representing news organizations. They establish strong relationships with various individuals in their areas due to their local residency, making them highly regarded by the community. Because he responds to the concerns of the local community. Stringers are often acquainted with politicians, officials, socialites, and other prominent figures. They possess in-depth knowledge of the region's unique characteristics, including social, economic, and political intricacies. Moreover, they are well-informed about individuals engaged in unlawful activities, such as robberies and rare criminal incidents.

They can easily write with authenticity on local news as they are born and brought up in the same society. We always see that he conveys the news written by him to the authorities and rulers on behalf of the people in his area. He reports on atrocities and discrimination in society, making society more rational and scientifically aware. Thus, he can cover all types of news in his area. His news articles are published in the "Districts Special" pages of the newspaper. He gives voice to the voice less. He acts as mouth piece of the dis-empowered.



Qualifications

To qualify as a stringer for mainstream newspapers, completion of a degree is a must. Also, possess essential skills to handle: a camera, a two-wheeler, and a smart phone. These tools are necessary for stringers working with press organizations. Following these qualifications, should be able to set up a small office if needed, and always follow company rules. Stringers should be ready to report from the scene in any situation and cover all important information in news articles. Educational background if he/she have tenth class standard doesn't matter much, especially for smaller newspapers. Every stringer needs to handle tools like a smart phone, camera, and a two-wheeler. Following press policies strictly (every media has their own policy), and being able to get advertisements is important. Stringers should be flexible and able to do multiple tasks in the media.

Stringers and District Edition Special Pages

As mentioned earlier, the introduction of the Stringer system brought regional news to the forefront and extended the reach of newspapers to the village level. This shift also led to changes in the number of vacancies and the quantity of district special editions.

Dr K. Rajaram, Associate Professor (EFL University, HYD), Experience in journalism profession, emphasized that the Stringer system significantly improved the quality of news reporting. Stringers, being local residents, could quickly reach the scene of incidents and had the opportunity to interact with various communities, view news from different angles, and conduct thorough investigations. They are able to leverage their contacts and sources to gather news directly, ensuring that no important events are missed in their areas of reporting.

This direct collection of news led to an increase in both the quality and quantity of news. The Stringer system played a crucial role in spreading newspapers to remote villages and contributed to the magazines' competitiveness in the media landscape.

The news gathered by Stringers is published in district editions. The number of Stringers in each newspaper depends on the special pages, zones, and divisions of that newspaper. The number of Stringers also varies based on the priority given to local news by the newspaper. Major newspapers have district editions with special pages, including zonal pages, where Stringers play a significant role.

Today, newspapers have various specialized sections, with one Stringer assigned to each section, such as legal, educational, crime news, medical, sports, cultural, etc. Similarly, there is typically one Stringer appointed for each mandal in the entire district. For prominent colonies in towns, one Stringer may be assigned to two or three villages within a mandal, or one Stringer for larger villages.

The increase in the number of Stringers has led to an increase in news, advertisements, and newspaper circulation. Stringers write news contents by "**Date line**". Date line provides information about who wrote the news, where it was written from, and the date it was written.

Allam Narayana (Press Academy Chairmen, T.S) explains, "Newspapers appoint Stringers based on wings and divisions for their special pages. In Hyderabad city, there are various zones like Kukatpally Zone, Tarnaka Zone, Secunderabad Zone, Cultural Wing, Education Wing, Health Wing, Political Beat, etc. Newspapers hire



Stringers for the specific beats they need in order to provide news, stories, and features under the date line in the district edition of the newspaper."

"Stringers' News Reporting Responsibilities

Stringers' primary function is news collection. They write stories, conducting surveys, and performing case studies.

News Collection: Stringers gather news through various means. Stringers working in cities and towns obtain press notes from the press and collect press copies when sit-ins occur. They often rely on calling or texting local officials, especially those from the police and other departments in their working area, to obtain news details. Stringers maintain close relationships with local residents, so enthusiastic individuals often contact them and provide news details, eyewitness accounts, and other relevant information about incidents.

Additionally, they hold monthly meetings regarding story assignments. At the beginning of each month, they receive targets to write stories about significant dates, such as the birth or death anniversaries of national leaders who have made contributions to society in the past, festivals, celebrations, and other relevant topics for that month. Stringers prepare and write these stories in advance while also covering news events.

Surveys: Regarding surveys, these are concise yet vital reports collected from the field level. They often include data to support their findings. Surveys focus on how social welfare schemes are reaching people in villages and mandals, including details about beneficiaries. Stringers also report the perspectives of officials regarding the nominal success of these schemes. Stringers collect detailed information at the field level.

In preparation for elections and to gauge the people's political leanings, Stringers conduct surveys to gather information on education, healthcare, agriculture, and other relevant topics from the field.

Case studies:Stringers also excel in creating factual case studies that focus on individuals rather than just general issues. These case studies are presented to the newspapers.

Stringers conduct surveys and case studies to investigate the implementation of government schemes at the grassroots level. They delve into public issues, collecting information about diseases, floods, crop losses, accidents, and fires even before government agencies do. This valuable information benefits both government officials and the public. The Stringer News Network system serves as a valuable resource for both the government and the people.

Beyond conducting surveys and case studies, Stringers conduct in-depth research to uncover the root causes of problems. Stringers are deeply committed to bringing out the facts from their local areas.

Stringers' Crucial role and Media Control in Journalism.

Media organizations provide guidelines to Stringers on what stories and features to write for the district special pages of the newspaper. These guidelines often focus on specific topics and themes to align with the organization's objectives and policies. Not all Stringers may agree with these directives, but they are expected to follow them, particularly regarding advertisements.



For example, a newspaper like "Andhra Jyoti" specifies the topics and themes for features and articles that Stringers should write about. These topics can cover a wide range, including youth, general interest, women, culture, senior citizens, farmers, and children. Stringers are responsible for creating content within these predefined parameters.

Stringers receive specific targets and are expected to write features and articles while contributing news from their respective regions to the newspapers. In today's media landscape, many features and articles produced by press organizations are oriented toward advertisements, and Stringers often receive directives on what to write. This editorial control helps the newspapers align with their owners' objectives and policies and ensures they are well-received by the public. These features and articles also contribute to the financial strength of the media organization.

Kasula Prathapareddy (senior journalist) noted, "Nowadays, articles related to advertisements have increased in the district pages. It has now become such that if all the articles are written, a certain number of advertisements will follow." Most of the stories and articles in the district pages are written by Stringers.

In some newspapers, news contributors receive feedback and suggestions for improvement, often orally during news analysis. Stringers are closely observed by upper staff, and their performance is evaluated based on the number of news items they submit. Stringers may receive instructions and suggestions to improve their work, and in cases of consistent mistakes, they may face reprimands or even dismissal.

District news coverage is particularly important for major newspapers such as Eenadu, Sakshi, Velugu, Andhra Jyoti, Namaste Telangana, among others. For example, Andhra Jyoti magazine uses its **quality cell** publication, "Darpanam," to inform Stringers about news coverage, editing, errors, and any missing content in the district special pages. This publication helps Stringers understand the supervision and control mechanisms in place for their duties within the Andhra Jyoti newspaper.

"Stringers Contribute, District Staff Reporters Receive Credit: Uncovering the Disparity in Recognition":

The inputs and information provided by Stringers are frequently utilized by staff reporters when crafting stories for the district edition. Occasionally, Stringers may contribute to a story and provide their perspective, but the story is published under the staff reporter's name. This practice allows staff reporters to leverage their creative abilities and claim credit for the work.

Unfortunately, this means that Stringers often do not receive proper recognition for their contributions, and their line accounts may suffer as a result. This situation can create feelings of resentment and frustration among Stringers who feel their efforts go unnoticed or uncredited.

Union leader Narendhar Reddy (ExSecretary TWJU Leader) explained, "During elections, information from rural reporters in all the villages and mandal reporters at the mandal level is critical for understanding the political landscape in the district. This information is fully utilized, but the credit and recognition often go to the staff reporters. When there is crop damage in the district, the details about the crop losses at the mandal level, if reported by the mandal reporters, are turned into stories, and staff reporters claim the credit. As a result,



stringers lose their line accounts and the credit they deserve. Many stories from rural areas are now written as district-level stories, and staff reporters get the credit for them."

II.CONCLUSION

In conclusion, stringers play a vital role in the journalism landscape, operating as informal yet indispensable contributors to news organizations. Their unique position as local news gatherers, building strong community relationships, allows them to convey news with a focus on societal issues, contributing to inform and scientifically aware reporting. Despite the absence of a fixed salary and official recognition, their multifaceted contributions, from news collection and advertisement gathering to case studies and surveys, demonstrate their significant impact on both journalism and the communities they serve. The close monitoring and feedback stringers receive underscore the importance placed on their performance, especially in the context of major newspapers' district news coverage. Overall, the dynamic role of stringers reflects their crucial function in shaping local news narratives and fostering community engagement within the broader media landscape.

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