Chapter-III

Methodology

A descriptive research method employing both quantitative and qualitative tool was used to arrive at some systematic and credible findings. A content analysis methodology was employed enabling an objective, systematic, quantitative description of the content (Berelson, 1954) and assessment of the relative extent to which specified references, judgments, attitudes, or themes permitted the items (Stone, 1964) to analyse 240 issues of newspapers.

The study begins from the month of October 1st 2011 with the collection of news, articles and features of *"The Meghalaya Times" and "The ShillongTimes"* news items. All news articles related to the issues identified under the present research work and hard news items were collected over a random 10-day period for each month, for a period spanning over one year. Two magazines, published from the state in English language, namely *The North East Today* and The *Eastern Panorama* articles were scanned for 24 issues to find out articles on the relevant issues.

3.1 Study Method:

The researcher has used the technique of content analysis in conducting the research. Content analysis is a well-established research methodology. Neuendorf (2002) describes content analysis as "the primary message- centered methodology" and cites studies such as Riffe and Freitag (1997), Yale, and Gilly (1988) which "reported that in the field of mass communication research, content analysis has been the fastest-growing technique over the

past 20 years. Content analysis is used to study a broad range of 'texts' from transcripts of interviews and discussions in clinical and social research to the narrative and form of films, TV programs and the editorial and advertising content of newspapers and magazines. Content Analysis is described as the scientific study of content of communication. It is the study of the content with reference to the meanings, contexts, and intentions contained in messages. In 1952, Bernard Berelson published Content analysis in Communication Research, which heralded recognition for the technique as a versatile tool for social science and media researchers. Some scholars adopted it for historical and political research as well (Holsti, 1968). However, the method achieved greater popularity among social science scholars as well as a method of communication research (Wimmer and Dominick, 1994:163). The development of content analysis as a full-fledged scientific method took place during World War II when the U.S. government sponsored a project under the directorship of Harold Lasswell to evaluate enemy propaganda. Content denotes what is contained and content analysis is the analysis of what is contained in a message. Broadly content analysis may be seen as a method where the content of the message forms the basis for drawing inferences and conclusions about the content (Nachimias and Nachimias, 1976). Further, content analysis falls in the interface of observation and document analysis. It is defined as a method of observation in the sense that instead of asking people to respond to questions, it "takes the communications that people have produced and asks questions of communications" (Kerlinger, 1973). Therefore, it is also considered as an unobtrusive or non-reactive method of social research. "Content analysis is a systematic method for analyzing and quantifying message content and message handling. It is a tool for observing and analyzing the overt communication behavior of selected communicators" (Budd, Thorp, and Donohew,1967, p. 2). Instead of soliciting people's behavior directly (through interviews), or measuring response to specific events

or stimuli, content analysis may be used to analyze communications that people have produced as accounts of behavior (Kerlinger, 1964). The most important step in content analysis is the identification and categorization of the variables under study. Categories, such as subject matter or direction categories, serve the same function as variables in content analysis. As Budd, Thorp, and Donohew (1967) caution, "No content analysis is better than its categories." Variables (categories) must be defined through an operational definition or set of definitions.

The researcher has taken two newspapers published from Shillong for content analysis, *"The Shillong Times"* and *"The Meghalaya Times"*. The news items published in these newspapers and magazines are analyzed to find out the relative importance accorded by both these newspapers and magazines to the issues highlighted by the researcher.

3.1.1 Advantages of Content Analysis:

Content analysis offers several advantages to researchers.
Content analysis helps to look at

a. Communication via texts or transcripts and hence gets at the central aspect of social interaction,

b. It Can be used to interpret texts for purposes such as the development of expert systems

c. It has an unobtrusive means of analyzing interactions,

d. Normally it allows for both quantitative and qualitative operations,

3.1.2 Disadvantages:

a. It is normally time consuming and is often laborious and tedious,

b. Is subject to increased error, especially when relational analysis is undertaken to attain a higher level of interpretation,

c. It Is often devoid of theoretical underpinning and sometimes attempts to relaxed in terms of drawing meaningful inferences about the relationships and impacts implied in a study,

d. It Is almost inherently reductive, particularly when dealing with complex texts,

3.2 Sample Selection:

The researcher has taken up randomly any 'ten days' newspapers of a month and analyzed 120 issues of each newspaper (total 240 issues) spanning over a period of one year.

The researcher has also adopted analytical survey method for the study. The study focuses mainly on regular newspaper readers. Initially quantitative approach has been used in order to collect data. The study has also taken within its ambit two English magazines published from Shillong. The magazines were scanned for one year during the same study period. 24 issues of the two magazines were scanned for the purpose of the research work. The stories and articles published in these two magazines were not exposed to print measurement. Rather the stories were analyzed on the basis of qualitative indicators like type, orientation and placement or the treatment of the stories. The data collection involves multistage sampling. First, the researcher has undertaken a preliminary fieldwork with the newspaper readers. After the identification of the newspaper readers in the town, 100 newspaper

readers were identified who depend solely on *"The Meghalaya Times"* and *"The Shillong Times"* for news of the state and the city of Shillong. The questionnaire was used for the purpose of pre-test to finalize the questions. The pre-test has helped to form the final questionnaire, which was administered on a sub set of 150 respondents with same kind of adherence. The researcher has administered the final questionnaire on the final set of respondents i.e., 100 respondents. The questionnaire had close ended questions to get the idea about the readers' issue salience.

3.2.1 Rationale for Sampling:

These two newspapers were selected with a view to understand the importance of civic news in the Agenda Setting Newspapers of the state of Meghalaya. These newspapers are called agenda setters because *"The Shillong Times"* happens to be most widely circulated English newspaper of the state with an unquestionable hold over the imagination of its readers all over the state. *"The Meghalaya Times"* was chosen because it is the second largest circulated daily in the state. The magazines, the *North East Today* and The *Eastern Panorama* were selected as these are the only magazines published from Shillong. So it was needed to take into cognizance how far east and northeastern newspapers were alive to the most baffling problems of the state. Though the study was a census by nature, samples of the study were chosen purposively with a view to trace the variations in the reporting pattern in the two different newspapers

3.3 Unit of Analysis:

The unit of analysis for this study was the article or story. Measuring the actual length of all articles was thought to be rejected, but later on included to make an attempt to develop a formula that would have taken into account changes during the two years span. The stories which have hinted at an impending policy decisions or tried to break a news or brought into focus some neglected news have been termed as pro-active stories. The opinion pieces have also been clubbed under the same category. The news items which have merely reported a newsworthy event, however serious have been categorized as reactive.

The researcher has coded each and every news item under the following categories with a view to dissect every news item to bring out what lies beneath the surface. The stories coded accordingly were placed on the excel sheet to ascertain how much space was given to each category and what really were the guiding factors to determine a news story as printable, what qualitative aspects of a story paves its way to the front page or accord it a special quality to be treated as an anchor story on the front page.

3.3.1 Quantitative aspects

1. **Measures of prominence:**

- Frequency of reporting

- Page of item

- Location in page(upper and lower fold, left or right quadrant)

- Text size

3.3.2 Qualitative aspects

2. Orientation of reporting

- Policy

- Type of report – event announcement, new item, recurring item, mixed new and recurring item (indicator of flavour of item reported)

- Nature of reporting – article, feature article, column, editorial, (relative indicator of importance of item)

3. Source

- Reporter (indicator of the interest of the newspaper in giving due importance to a particular area of regular news creations)

- Agency (indicator of a newspaper's interest in covering news from areas beyond its immediate area in making the spectrum of news more comprehensive)

4. Type of Reporting:

- Positive or negative (assesses the way in which readers may perceive reported Environmental items as good or bad)

- Whether Pro-Active or Reactive?

3.4 Measuring instrument: A close ended questionnaire was used for the purpose of obtaining the readers feedback to ascertain whether the perceived attempts by newspapers under consideration were successful in setting the agenda.

3.5 Data Collection:

Survey research study was conducted among the urban middle class people of Shillong town from the age of 20 to 45 and above. The researcher has taken 100 respondents as her sample. Simple random sampling was used to conduct the survey.

3.5.1 Variables:

The variables for the readers' feedback are

i) Newspaper reading

ii) Issue salience

3.6 Time in Data Collection

The data was collected by the researcher over a period of one year

3.7 Coding:

Holsti's method was used to compute the reliability score of the coding of the stories as it is considered as one of the simplest methods for accessing agreement. Holsti's (1969), method normally counts the number of judgments that are the same and divides this sum by the total number of judgments made. The sample coding was done by two coders; the coders were provided with a coding sheet and the coding instructions and both the coders were taken into confidence by explaining to them the issues in a clear way. Coders were

asked to code the stories according to issue specificity and the source of the stories which were published within the given time frame.

3.7.1 Inter coder reliability:

Inter-coder reliability is defined as ―the extent to which independent coders evaluate a characteristic of a message or artifact and reach the same conclusion.It is considered as an essential criterion for validating subjectively coded data. It is usually considered as an accepted method of summarizing the substance of a set of mediated messages often usedas a constituent of content analysis.

Inter-coder reliability for the study was made by following the Holsti method. The result of the study showed an agreement of .948 on the total number of stories published in case of Shillong Times. Holsti's reliability co-efficient in case of "*The Shillong Times*" stories is as follows: Holsti's reliability = $2M \div N1 + N2 = 2 \times 73 \div 77 + 77 = .948$ ‗M' represents the total number of coding events about whose categories the two coders agreed upon. N1' represents the total number of coding decisions by the first coder and ‗N2' represents the total number of coding decisions by the second coder (Wimmer& Dominick 1997:128; Ding & Hu 1999:102). The measurement of intercoder reliability stands at .948. In case of "*The Meghalaya Times*" the reliability score according to Holsti's reliability index calculation stands at , $2M \div N1 + N2 = 2 \times 57 \div 62 + 62 = .919$. M' represents the total number of coding events about whose categories the two coders agreed upon. N1' represents the total number of coding decisions by the first coder and ‗N2'represents the total number of coding decisions by the second coder.

The magazine stories, seven in number were coded by both the coders but these were not put to reliability test as the number of stories was very less. The coders applied face validity to validate the stories.

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