



Factors Influencing Journalists' Decisions To Cover Cybercrime: A Study Of Karnataka State

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Abstract: Digital technologies are being adopted across almost every sector in the present day. The easy accessibility of the internet and the popularity of smartphones have significantly contributed to the growth of digital technologies. These advancements greatly influence financial activities, governance, communication, entertainment, and various other domains. However, the rapid growth of digital technologies has also contributed to an increase in criminal activities that take advantage of these innovations. Cybercrime, a growing category of such crimes, is increasingly targeting individuals, organizations, and institutions. Despite the government implementing several preventive measures, the rate of cybercrime continues to rise. Mass media plays a vital role in addressing this issue by raising awareness through its coverage. However, the relatively new and complex nature of cybercrime, which occurs in the digital realm, presents new challenges for media coverage. To effectively understand and report these issues, they require specialized knowledge and skills. This study investigates the factors that influence journalists' decisions while covering cybercrime. The researcher collected data from a sample of 160 journalists across Karnataka, selected through a simple random sampling technique, using the survey method. The findings of this research aim to shed light on the challenges and considerations journalists face in reporting cybercrime and contribute to improving the quality and effectiveness of such coverage

Index Terms - Cybercrime, media, Coverage, New Media, Journalists

I. INTRODUCTION

Internet is one of the most innovative invention of the 21st century. It has revolutionised the communication, commerce, education, governance and many other domains. It has influenced the everyday life of the individuals. The activity such as online shopping, work from home, social networking, online financial transactions, travel reservations, accessing medical facilities are very common in the present day. The government initiatives such as Digital India and popularising E-governance also contributed to the growth of online activities in the country. 'The Digital India initiative of the Indian Government has been engaging and transforming lives and livelihoods at the grassroots through technological interventions. The platform has been able to create a sense of unified response in every part of the country to pandemics, calamity, and crisis; it has contributed to the sustainable well-being of the people in the country. (Keerthana P Girijan, 2024).

The widespread popularity of smartphone and expansion of 5G network in India is another factor which forcing the digitisation across different sectors. 'The smartphone market is expected to reach one billion smartphone users by 2026,' according to Deloitte's 2022 Global TMT (Technology, Media and Entertainment, Telecom) predictions'. 'According to Counterpoint Research, India's smartphone market has emerged as the second largest globally by unit volume and third largest by value in the third quarter of 2024. In this period, India accounted for 15.5% of global smartphone shipments, trailing only China, which held a 22% share. The United States followed with a 12% share' (India's Smartphone Market Becomes Second Largest Globally by Unit Volume, 2024).

However the rapid growth of internet and widespread of smartphones have also exposed the individuals to the new types of risks and threats. Cyberattacks on India are projected to rise to a staggering 1 trillion per annum by 2033, reaching 17 trillion by 2047, when the country turns 100, said a study by PRAHAR (Public Response against Helplessness & Action for Redressal). Due to the increase in the cybercrime rate, the cyber security has become a global concern. The crime ranging from phishing and ransomware to identity theft and data breaches, continue to rise despite advances in security technologies. Malicious actors exploit the vulnerabilities inherent in digital systems, often targeting the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of information. Among the many victims of cybercrime, women are particularly vulnerable, facing threats such as online harassment, cyberstalking, and financial fraud. The complex and evolving nature of cybercrime necessitates robust reporting to raise awareness, educate the public, and advocate for stronger protective measures.

Media play an essential role in distributing the awareness contents related to cyber security to the individuals. However, the decision to cover cybercrime is influenced by various factors, including the availability of credible information, editorial policies, audience interest, and journalists' familiarity with digital technologies. These decisions are particularly significant in Karnataka, a state known for its rapid digital growth.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Perwej, D., Abbas, and Et.al (2021) in the study "A Systematic Literature review on the Cyber Security" explained the significance of cyber security in the present world. They have also studied the application security, network security and information security and the significance of understanding and adopting it in the network infrastructures in order to protect ourselves from the cyber attacks. The study also focused on variety of cyber threats and its preventive measures. The study states that Cyber security is critical to the advancement of both information technology and Internet services. Therefore it is essential for the states to create and maintain secured infrastructural networks.

Ahmad E. & Verma R. N, (2019). In their "A Comparative Analysis of Crime Stories Published in leading English Newspapers of Delhi Edition" explains crime reporting has become a major category in Indian newspapers. The increasing demand for crime stories, which are written to grab readers' attention. Its popularity is further increased by the fact that such reporting frequently places a higher priority on dramatic narratives than on in-depth analysis or productive debate. The study emphasizes how sensationalism and market-driven tactics influence crime reporting in Indian English-language daily.

Vijay (2021) in his study "A Critical Examination Of Cyber Crimes In Central India, With Particular Reference To Social Media" elaborates that the wide variety of cybercrimes cannot be controlled by the present law system. The article explore the types of crime which takes place on social media platforms. The study highlights the growth and development of social networking sites and how it influenced the way people communicate with each other. The study also explored how the popularity of social media opened the gates of new criminal activities in the digital modes.

Sankhwar, S., Et.al. (2024) in the study 'Cybercrime in India: An analysis of crime against women in ever expanding digital space' analysed the data related to cybercrime against women. The study makes it clear that women are the soft targets for many cybercriminals and cyber fraudsters compared to men. The study identifies women as particularly vulnerable to cybercrimes such as harassment, stalking, and exploitation on social media platforms.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

The study titled "Factors Influencing Journalists' Decisions to Cover Cybercrime: A Study of Karnataka State" tries to understand the factors influencing the coverage of cybercrime and challenges faced by the journalists to cover this issue.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

- To assess the factors influencing the decisions to cover cyber crime among journalist
- To understand the challenges faced by the journalists to report cybercrime
- To study the frequency of cybercrime coverage in the media
- To study the sources of cybercrime news

METHODOLOGY:

For the present study, the descriptive research design is adopted. A simple random sampling technique is used to select the sample size. Four major cities of Karnataka i.e Bengaluru, Mysuru, Hubballi-Dharwad & Mangaluru have been selected to study the problem. The primary data is collected from 40 respondents from each city randomly through a structured questionnaire, a total of 160 respondents has been selected.

FIGURES AND TABLES**Table 01: Gender**

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	98	61.25
Female	62	38.75

Table 01 shows that among the total respondents selected for the study 61.25% (N=98) are males and 38.75% (N=62) are females.

Table 02: Age

Age (in Years)	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 30 Years	28	17.50
30 to 40 years	79	49.38
41 to 50 years	41	25.63
Above 50 years	12	7.50

Table 02 explains the distribution of the respondents on the basis of their age majority of the respondents belongs to the age group of 30 to 40 years i.e. 49.38% (N=79), followed by 41 to 50 years are 25.63% (N=41), 17.50% (N=28) belongs to the age group of less than 30 years, and very less number of respondents belongs to the age group of above 50 years i.e. 7.50% (N=12)

Table 03: Type of Media

Type of Media	Frequency	Percentage
Print Media	82	51.25
Electronic Media	61	38.13
New Media	17	10.63

Table 03 analyses the occupational information of the media professionals considered for the study, majority of the respondents i.e. 51.25% (N=82) are working for print media, and 38.13% (N=61) working in electronic media, and only 10.63% (N=17) working for new media.

Table 04: Nature of Work

Nature of work	Frequency	Percentage
Crime Reporter	31	19.38
General Reporter	67	41.88
Stringer	28	17.50
Content Producer	23	14.38
Other	11	6.88

Table 04 explains the nature of work of the journalists considered for the study, a great majority of them are general reporters i.e. 41.88% (N=67), followed by 19.38% (N=31) are crime reporters, 17.50% (N=28) are working as stringers, 14.38% (N=23) are content producers and 6.88% (N=11) are working in other departments of the media houses.

Table 05: Mass Media Experience

Experience	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 3 years	15	9.38
3 to 5 years	24	15.00
5 to 10 years	65	40.63
10 to 15 years	39	24.38
More than 15 Years	17	10.63

Table 05 illustrates the media professionals' mass media experience. The largest proportion of respondents, 40.63% (N=65), have 5 to 10 years of experience in mass media. This is followed by 24.38% (N=39), who have 10 to 15 years of experience. Respondents with 3 to 5 years of experience constitute 15.00% (N=24), and 10.63% (N=17) have more than 15 years of experience. Only 9.38% (N=15) of the respondents have less than 3 years of experience in mass media.

Table 06: Frequency of reporting cyber crime

Coverage	Frequency	Percentage
Very often	77	48.13
Occasionally	50	31.25
Rarely	26	16.25
Never	7	4.38

Table 06 shows the frequency of reporting cybercrime by the journalists in their publications. A significant majority, i.e., 48.13% (N=77), say that they report cybercrime very often. This is followed by 31.25% (N=50) who report it occasionally. A smaller proportion, i.e., 16.25% (N=26), say that they report cybercrime rarely, and only 4.38% (N=7) said that they have never reported cybercrime.

It is understood from the study that nearly half of the reporters who reports cyber crime very often and very less number of journalists rarely reported cybercrime

Table 07: Factors influencing the decision to cover cybercrime

Factors	Frequency	Percentage
Public interest	18	11.25
Editorial policy	20	12.50
Severity of the crime	78	48.75
Availability of credible sources	32	20.00
Personal interest in the topic	9	5.63
Other	3	1.88

Table 07 examines the factors affecting journalists' decisions to report cybercrime. Nearly half of the respondents, i.e., 48.75% (N = 78), agreed that the severity of the crime was the primary factor in reporting cybercrime, followed by the availability of credible sources, cited by 20.00% (N = 32). Editorial policy constitutes 12.50% (N=20), while public interest represents 11.25% (N=18). Personal interest in the issue accounted for 5.63% (N=9), whereas just 1.88% (N=3) of respondents stated other factors.

Table 08: Importance of severity of cybercrime in its coverage

Severity	Frequency	Percentage
Extremely important	53	33.13
Very important	42	26.25
Somewhat important	51	31.88
Not important	14	8.75

Table 08 shows the journalists' opinion on the importance of the severity of cybercrime in its coverage. The largest group of respondents, 33.13% (N=53), considers the severity of cybercrime to be extremely important in its coverage. This is followed by 31.88% (N=51), who find it somewhat important. Those who consider it as very important constitute 26.25% (N=42), while only 8.75% (N=14) believe the severity of cybercrime is not important for its coverage.

Table 09: Audience interest impacting the coverage

Opinion	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	50	31.25
Agree	77	48.13
Neutral	28	17.50
Disagree	2	1.25
Strongly disagree	3	1.88

Table 09 illustrates how journalists believe audience interest influences their coverage of cybercrime. The majority of respondents, 48.13% (N=77), agree that audience interest significantly impacts coverage. 31.25% (N=50) strongly agree with this. A smaller proportion, 17.50% (N=28), are neutral on the matter, while 1.88% (N=3) strongly disagree, and 1.25% (N=2) disagree with the statement.

Table 10: Understanding of technology and digital crimes influence the decision to cover cybercrime

Influencing the decision	Frequency	Percentage
To a great extent	81	50.63
To some extent	44	27.50
Very little	24	15.00
Not at all	11	6.88

The information organised in Table 10 indicates the influence of understanding technology and digital crimes on journalists' decisions to cover cybercrime. A majority of the respondents, 50.63% (N=81), believe that understanding technology and digital crimes influences their decision to a great extent. This is followed by 27.50% (N=44), who feel it influences their decision to some extent. A smaller proportion, 15.00% (N=24), report that it influences their decision very little, while 6.88% (N=11) state that it does not influence their decision to the coverage of cybercrime.

Table 11: challenges encountered while reporting cybercrime

Challenges	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of access to reliable sources or information	114	71.25
Technical complexity of cybercrime cases	98	61.25
Legal restrictions or concerns	63	39.38
Difficulty in verifying facts	72	45.00
Pressure from editorial policies or commercial interests	18	11.25
Limited public interest in cybercrime topics	11	6.88
Others	37	23.13

Table 11 examines the challenges faced by the journalists in reporting cybercrime. The major challenge cited by the majority of the respondents is lack of access to reliable sources or information related to cybercrime; it is reported by 71.25% (N=114) of respondents. Followed by this, the technical complexity of cybercrime cases is reported by 61.25% (N=98) of the respondents. Difficulty in verifying facts is a challenge for 45.00% (N=72); legal restrictions or concerns are a challenge for 39.38% (N=63). Pressure from editorial policies or commercial interests is stated by 11.25% (N=18); limited public interest in cybercrime topics is an issue for 6.88% (N=11). and 23.13% (N=37) of respondents mention other challenges in the coverage of cyber crime.

Table 12: Commercial pressures affect the Coverage on cybercrime

Opinion	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	12	7.50
Agree	14	8.75
Neutral	42	26.25
Disagree	92	57.50

Table 12 explains the opinion of the respondents on commercial pressure affecting the coverage of cybercrime. The majority of respondents, 57.50% (N=92), disagree that commercial pressures affect their coverage of cybercrime. 26.25% (N=42) remain neutral on the issue. 8.75% (N=14) of the respondents

agree with the statement, while only 7.50% (N=12) strongly agree that commercial pressures influence their reporting on cyber issues.

Table 13: Need of adequate training for journalists to effectively cover cybercrime

Training	Frequency	Percentage
Required	112	70.00
Not Required	48	30.00

Table 13 examines the need for adequate training for journalists to effectively cover cybercrime. A significant majority, i.e., 70.00% (N=112), said that there is a need for training to effectively cover cybercrime. Whereas 30.00% (N=48) say that training is not required.

Table 14: Common sources for reporting on cybercrime

Sources	Frequency	Percentage
Government officials	82	51.25
Cyber security experts	37	23.13
Victims or witnesses	75	46.88
Online resources	22	13.75
Legal experts	12	7.50
Other	21	13.13

Table 14 analyzes the common sources used for reporting on cybercrime. The most frequently used source is government officials, stated by 51.25% (N=82) of respondents. Respondents who consider victims or witnesses as sources follow closely behind, accounting for 46.88% (N=75). Cybersecurity experts are cited by 23.13% (N=37), while online resources are used by 13.75% (N=22). Legal experts as a source for 7.50% (N=12) and 13.13% (N=21) mention other sources.

CONCLUSION:

It is understood from the study that cybercrime is one of the major elements that is reported in the media. Most reporters frequently cover cybercrime in their publications. It is also understood from the research that out of many factors that influence the decision to publish cybercrime, the severity of the crime stands out as the major factor for its coverage, and most of the reporters said that it is an extremely important factor for the coverage of cybercrime. Another important factor that influences the decision to cover a topic is the audience's interest in it. The study also highlights that journalists encounter numerous obstacles when covering cyber-related issues, with the primary one being their inability to access dependable sources or information. Another challenge that impacts the coverage is the technical complexity of cybercrime. The study also reveals that journalists require adequate training to enhance their knowledge and expertise in covering cyber issues. Regarding sources, the majority of them indicated that they primarily rely on government officials for their news and information on cybercrime.

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