

Measuring Readability of Farm Information Published in Newspapers

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Introduction

Print media have been accepted as an important means of communication. Printed words are effective as compared to other mass media because they hold certain merits. These words help the communicator to think, organize ideas and choose better so that the reader can understand the ideas easily (Salunkhe and Sawant, 1984). Printed words are largely used for communicating useful farm information to literate farmers, thus catering to the needs of farming communities. Printed material is being used increasingly with steady improvement in literacy rate in the country (Anonymous, 2002).

An attempt was made to measure the readability of farm information published in a newspaper of Konkan region with the following objectives:

1. To measure the readability of farm information published in a newspaper with the help of readability formula.
2. To obtain the suggestions of farmers for improving readability.

Methodology

The study was conducted in College Development Block of Ratnagiri district which includes Chiplun, Dapoli, Khed and Mandangad tahsils. From each tahsil, five villages were selected randomly and from each village five respondents were selected for the study i.e. twenty five respondents from each tahsil. In the present study, literate farmers were considered as respondents.

A Marathi language daily 'Sakal' (Kolhapur edition) was selected for measuring the readability of farm information published in the newspaper.

The research technique called 'Shirke Formula' was introduced in 2003 by V.S. Shirke for measuring readability in Marathi of farm information published in newspapers. It is based on the review and linguistic and basic components of Marathi language described by Walambe (1995), seven in letters, Laghu matra, Guru matra, total matra, number of

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syllables, average length of sentence in words and percentage of difficult words which were considered in the present study for the purpose of developing readability formula.

Findings

1. Perceived Readability of Farm Information published in Newspaper for Farmers

Table 1. Readability level of Farm Information as perceived by the Respondents

Sr. No.	Components	Respondents (n = 100)	
		Frequency	Percentage
1	2	3	4
I. Words			
1. Difficult to read and understand		7	7.00
2. Easy to read and understand		41	41.00
3. Very easy to read and understand		52	52.00
II. Technical words			
1. Very difficult to read and understand		23	23.00
2. Difficult to read and understand		58	58.00
3. Easy to read and understand		19	19.00
III. Sentence length			
1. Long		15	15.00
2. Medium		36	36.00
3. Small		49	49.00
IV. Paragraph (size)			
1. Big		29	29.00
2. Medium		45	45.00
3. Small		26	26.00
V. Title or heading (appropriateness)			
1. Inappropriate		6	6.00
2. Somewhat appropriate		36	36.00
3. Appropriate		58	58.00
VI. Titles or heading (adequacy)			
1. Inadequate		10	10.00
2. More than adequate		20	20.00
3. Adequate		70	70.00

VII. Illustration (appropriateness)

1. Inappropriate	59	59.00
2. Some what appropriate	13	13.00
3. Appropriate	28	28.00

VIII. Tables and charts (sufficiency)

1. Too many	34	34.00
2. Little more than sufficient	34	34.00
3. Sufficient	32	32.00

IX. Type size

1. Too small to be read	19	19.00
2. Able to read with little difficulty	44	44.00
3. Easy to read	37	37.00

1.1 Words

On perusal of data from Table 1, it is clear that a majority of the respondents (52 per cent) expressed that the words were 'very easy to read and understand'. Forty one per cent of the respondents felt that the words were 'easy to read and understand', while only 7 per cent of the respondents had 'difficulty in reading and understanding' the words. As the farm information was specially published for the sake of farmers, the writers and editors seem to have been successful in using very simple words and thus, a majority of the respondents could easily read and understand the words.

1.2 Technical words

Majority of the respondents (58 per cent) felt that the technical words were 'difficult to read and understand' while 23 per cent of the respondents perceived technical words as 'very difficult to read and understand'. Only 19 per cent respondents could 'easily read and understand' the technical words.

Considering the low level of literacy skills of the respondents, it is, quite natural that technical words were perceived as difficult to read and understand. The appropriate words as alternatives to technical words need to be used in writing for farmers. Giving meaning to the technical words may also help, to some extent, to improve readability.

1.3 Sentences (length)

Sentences were perceived as 'small in length' by 49 per cent of farmer respondents, while, 36 per cent perceived sentences as having 'medium length'. Fifteen per cent respondents felt that the sentences were 'lengthy'.

The perception of the respondents as small and moderate sentences was correct as it was found in an attempt to calculate readability that the average sentence length was quite small i.e. 7 to 8 words per sentence.

1.4 Paragraph (size)

A majority of the respondents (45 per cent) expressed that the paragraphs were medium in size. Paragraphs were perceived to be big and small in size by 29 and 26 per cent of the respondents respectively.

The slow reading speed of farmers required more time to read. Therefore, they took more time to read a paragraph than other readers. The paragraph breaks monotony in reading. Hence, small paragraphs are required for farmer readers. As they have perceived paragraphs to be small and medium, it can be inferred that the paragraphs were really of suitable size.

1.5 Title or Headings (appropriateness)

More than half (58 per cent) of the respondents felt that the titles or headings were 'appropriate'. Thirty six per cent respondents perceived it to be 'somewhat appropriate' while only 6 per cent opinioned that the title or headings were 'inappropriate'.

The heading, sub-headings and titles add to the better reading and comprehension of the subject matter.

1.6 Title or Headings (adequacy)

Majority of the respondents (70 per cent) felt that the title or headings were 'adequate'. Twenty per cent respondents expressed that the titles or headings were 'more than adequate' while only 10 per cent respondents reported the headings were 'inadequate'.

Adequate number of titles, headings and subheadings in a document are necessary because they help in meaningful organization of farm information. The adequate number of headings/sub-headings add to readability in comprehension of information.

1.7 Illustrations (appropriateness)

It is evident from Table 1 that 59 per cent of the respondents reported that the illustrations were 'inappropriate', while, 28 per cent opined the illustrations to be 'appropriate'. Only 13 per cent readers opined that the illustrations were 'somewhat

appropriate'. It seems that the majority of the respondents wanted appropriate illustrations.

1.8 Table and Charts (sufficiency)

Equal percentage of respondents (34 per cent each) expressed that the tables and charts were 'too many' and 'little more than sufficient' while, 32 per cent of the respondents opined that the table and charts were sufficient.

The reason for this might be that, it was difficult to understand the tables and charts due to low level of education i.e. up to middle school level education observed in 65 per cent of the respondents.

1.9 Type size

Table 1 elucidates that majority of the respondents (44 per cent) expressed that they were able to read with little difficulty, while 19 per cent of the respondents expressed that the type size was too small to read. Thirty seven per cent respondents opined that they were easily able to read the farm information.

The respondents reporting the type size as too small to be read were generally above 45 years in age and due to poor eye sight were unable to read the boldly printed farm information. However, majority of the respondents still had some difficulty in reading on account of type size. The probable reasons might be the newness of the basic literacy skill, less reading experience and poor ability to identify the letters and words quickly.

It could be, thus summarized from the above findings that general words were easy to understand, while technical words were felt difficult by farmer readers. Length of sentences and size of paragraph were suitable. The titles and headings were appropriate and adequate. The illustrations given in the farm information were relevant but seemed to be inappropriate. Tables and charts included were more than required and appropriate type size has not been used. The results provide feedback to writers and editors of farm information for farmers to select easy technical words, use appropriate type of size, make judicious use of illustrations and reduce usage of tables and charts.

2. Overall Perceived Readability level of Farm Information published in Newspaper

The respondents were classified into three groups of readability viz., low readability level, medium readability level and high readability level on the basis of their overall perceived readability scores, with the help of mean SD formula. The data in this regard are given in Table 2.

Table 2. Overall Perceived Readability level of the Farm Information published in Newspaper

Sr. No.	Category	Respondents (n = 100)	
		Frequency	Percentage
1.	Low readability level (upto 20)	13	13.00
2.	Medium readability level (21 to 32)	68	68.00
3.	High readability level (33 and above)	19	19.00

Table 2 depicts that 68 per cent of the respondents perceived farm information to be moderately readable followed by high readability level (19 per cent). Only 13 per cent of the respondents perceived the farm information to be less readable. Thus, it can be concluded that, about 87 per cent of the respondents expressed that the literature was moderately to highly readable.

Perceived readability occurred more in medium readability level because more farmers were in the middle school category.

3. Suggestions of the Respondents for improving Readability

As can be seen in Table 3, majority of the respondents (43 per cent) suggested that the 'meaning of technical words must be written in the paragraph', while, 30 per cent of the respondents suggested that 'words in the paragraph must be big'.

Table 3. Suggestions of the Respondents for improving Readability

Sr. No.	Suggestions	Respondent (n = 100)	
		Frequency	Percentage
1.	Words in the paragraph must be big	30	30.00
2.	Meaning of technical words must be written in the paragraph	43	43.00
3.	Sentences must be small and easy in writing	26	26.00
4.	Paragraph must be small and attractive	16	16.00
5.	Title must be easy and appropriate	18	18.00
6.	Illustrations must be appropriate	23	23.00
7.	Tables and chart must be in sufficient numbers	27	27.00
8.	Type size should be big	21	21.00

Nearly, equal percentages, i.e. 26 per cent and 27 per cent of the respondents expressed that 'sentences must be small and easy in writing' and 'table and charts must be in sufficient number', respectively. Some of the suggestions by the respondents for

improving readability included, 'illustration must be appropriate' (23 per cent)', 'type size should be big' (21 per cent), 'title must be easy and appropriate' (18 per cent) and 'paragraph must be small and attractive'.

Conclusion

The findings revealed that readability of respondents (farmers) educated up to 9th to 10th standard is very good. They gain knowledge from farm information.

It is therefore, suggested that writers and extension workers should consider these variables while writing and providing farm information for farmers so that it will be more readable by them. The farmers should be encouraged and motivated to read more.

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