

Print Media and Environmental Issues: An Interface

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ABSTRACT:

Mass Media have been striving to fulfill their obligation of providing information, education and communication. These objectives encompass all issues be it social, cultural, economic, or political. Media have been regarded as watchdogs and are expected to play a vital role in not only projecting the prevalent problems but also to seek solutions.

Today, in the contemporary society environmental degradation has been the subject of discussion. Conservation of environment being a collective task, the role of media becomes very strong. In this context, an effort has been made in the research to examine how newspapers are providing fillip in tackling the environmental issues and particularly how these issues are taken to the public.

Awareness does not necessarily mean action. Newspapers therefore should not only focus on highlighting the environmental issues but lay equal emphasis on their follow up. The public involvement should be ensured with great perseverance which the newspapers can build up with constant follow up and update. This research paper attempts to document how newspapers create awareness and track the follow up action (if any) for its effectiveness.

A comparison of two leading dailies; one vernacular and English are been taken up for content analysis. The study will cover 30 issues each for comparison and meaning conclusions.

Key Words: Environmental Issues, Awareness, Newspapers, Follow up action, Remedy

INTRODUCTION

Environmental problems are gradually increasing all over the world and if continued at this rate the future generations will have to face dire consequences. Environment degradation is the deterioration of environment through depletion of resources such as air, water and soil; destruction of ecosystems; habitat destruction; extinction of wildlife and pollution. It causes severe damage to the environment making it unstable and imbalanced. In order to reduce the damage made to the environment due to human activities, people should adopt sustainable development goals. Sustainable development is the principle, followed for meeting human development goals while at the same time sustaining the ability of natural systems to provide the natural resources and ecosystem services upon which the economy and society depends.

The public should be aware of the causes, effect and ways to avoid the environmental degradation. The best way to reach out to the public is through mass media such as newspapers, television, radio and new media technologies. Mass media are the main link to educate and impart knowledge to the people regarding any issue. It also increases the concern and awareness that the public have towards all important issues but the main question is that being, "Do these mediums actually focus much on these issues?". And when focused upon the prominence given to the topic is also an important factor.

It is indeed of no doubt that mass media is a powerful tool to have been used and can be continued to bring about social change but what should be kept in mind while doing so is the prominence that must be given to the issue. The coverage of the story, extent of coverage, types of issues being covered, the style in which it is portrayed to the common people, the evidences, level of prominence should be given importance to.

The environment is one of the most important factors that plays a greater role in development and lifestyle of human beings. The major environmental issues such as waste disposal, water degradation, afforestation, loss of habitat, loss of soil fertility are being created is because of the greedy nature human. And therefore it is highly necessary that human beings to understand the inseparable relationship between environment and development and adopt policies of sustainable development. Mass media can play a very important role by educating man in this regard.

Environment communication is necessary, because the issues and problems can reach out to the people on time. Media support effective policy making, public participation and project implementation. It also explore and explain the risks and hazards, as well as to translate complex scientific information to the common people and to publish different stories of scientists, policymakers, NGO's, consumers related to environment.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to Bharvi Dutt, K. C. Garg and Archita Bhatta, India is attracting increasing attention within the climate debate due to its physical and political situation. The topic of environment in Indian English dailies has acquired a 2nd stage at -15% coverage (the first being health and medical issues). They say that the environment issues have increased in coverage from 3% in 1996 to 15% in 2008. Stated in their article “A qualitative assessment of the articles on environmental issues published in English-language Indian dailies”

Nirmala Thirumalaiah and Arul Aram have stated in their research paper ‘Framing of environment in English and Tamil newspapers in India’, Environmental problems are portrayed as scientific or political issues. While national newspapers go in for scientific source, Tamil newspapers used international news agency reports. Although Tamil papers carry issues such as biodiversity, sea level rise, air pollution they lack the depth of coverage. They say even in English newspapers the coverage is less unless the story is mediated through some source such as NGO's or government or official reports. They suggest that regional newspapers must carry articles and features to educate and persuade the people.

One of the research paper titled ‘Framing of Climate issues and ‘COP21’: U.S newspapers vs Indian newspapers’ by Masudul Karim Biswas and Nam Young Kim, opines that, the quality of news frames shapes public perceptions and understanding of an important issues like climate change or global warming and since the discussion of global warming is multi-dimensional, good newspaper coverage can include environmental coverage in different types of frames, such as economy, innovations and responsibility. The discussion of environment is no longer restricted to environmental consequences. Not only politicians and policymakers, business have begun to see economic opportunities with alternative and clean energy solutions. It also stated that both the U.S and Indian newspaper gave almost equal importance to global environmental issue coverage.

According to Arun Lucas whose research paper ‘Print Media’s coverage on Environmental issues in India’ was published on two national dailies states, that both of them do not give sufficient coverage to all the categories of environment news such as protection laws, pollution, editorial, letters to the editor etc. They suggest that dissemination of information in all the areas are necessary so that people are reminded of the need to protect nature.

‘Report green: An exploratory study of news coverage of environmental issues’ a paper authored by E. W. M. S Boyagoda concluded that the newspapers do cover environmental issues, though the subject matter did not receive much coverage. He said that the national newspapers did cover the environmental related issues but it was found that most stories were reported without any in-depth analysis whereas the regional newspapers did cover environmental reports but in the inner pages of the newspaper without any significant importance and they gave more importance to advertisements in

the front pages rather than covering environmental issues. It shows that the newspapers have not understood the social responsibility, as well as environmental journalism itself.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

There is a high necessity of creating the awareness amongst the public on sustainable development. As mass media believed to be the great means of communication, the study is focused on the print media coverage and encouragement of issues on environment and sustainable development

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

- To find out the importance given for the coverage of environmental issues
- To compare which newspaper has better space for sustainable development

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

The study is been carried out by content analysis method. A national daily 'The Hindu' and a Karnataka regional daily 'Prajavani' are been studied and observed during the month of February 2018. Each newspaper's writings on environment and sustainable development is been meticulously measured in terms of prominence, nature, placement and on many other parameters.

FINDINGS AND DATA ANALYSIS

From the findings of the study, it becomes evident that National and Regional newspapers do cover environmental issues in certain ways.

NATURE OF STORIES:

It was found that most of the reports were covered without any in-depth analysis. The Hindu seemed to have more coverage on the stories related to wildlife issues and some were on conservation of lakes and forests in the country. They also give importance to some issues related to agriculture and farming. Few reports are related to global warming and climate changes and there was a page dedicated on these issues titled 'Environment'. The supplement copies had pages that were dedicated to environment and wildlife in a few issues.

Prajavani reports were mainly focused on the issues related to agriculture, water crisis and revival of lakes in the city mostly. The highest importance being given to revival of the dying lakes inside and around the city limits. Second most prioritized was wildlife and forest conservation. Few full-page advertisements were carried out related to irrigation plants and schemes by the state government and water conservation, which were also seen in The Hindu. It also carried supplementary copies called 'Kamanabillu' which had articles on pollution and waste management.

PLACEMENT OF ARTICLES

Most of the reports were mere reports and have no much detailed information. The ones that had in-depth coverage were published in the inner pages.

Conservation and wildlife related news was found in the front page of The Hindu, with only 5.7% of the total coverage. The news stories covered in the National newspaper were mostly between 300-750 words and nearly half of them had photograph carried with.

The front page Environment news stories in Prajavani accounted to 8.9% but the total coverage of environmental and sustainable development stories were less compared to the National publication. They also did not cover many photographs as compared to the former and the news stories were all below 500 words.

ITEMS PUBLISHED

It was observed that, most of news were mere reports and did not carry much of awareness in both the national as well as regional publications. Some of the reports that

were published in the regional newspaper though tried to impart more information on waste management, water pollution and create awareness to revive lakes. It also carried out information about organic agriculture and ways to improve the yield.

Most of them in both the newspapers had the following order, news reports followed by features and articles, then came editorials followed by letters to the editor.

FRAMES

The news could be considered under different frames such as reports, awareness, politics, entertainment, science and education in both the languages.

Nature of the writings

| Newspaper | Just Reporting | Solution/awareness/education | Follow-ups | Law and policies |
|-----------|----------------|------------------------------|------------|------------------|
| The Hindu | 51% | 28% | 13% | 7% |
| Prajavani | 46% | 14% | 35% | 4% |

Amongst the both The Hindu and Prajavani newspapers 51% of the The Hindu coverage on environmental issues are in the form of a small reports, but the important point here just 7% of the Law and Policies related reports and writings published, which is to be altered. In Prajavani the situation is even poorer because only 4% of law and policy related issues are printed and regarding awareness just about 14% of the prominence given.

Patterns of stories printed

| Newspaper | News Report | Editorial | Feature/Article | Letters to the Editor |
|-----------|-------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| The Hindu | 63% | 6 | 28% | 3% |
| Prajavani | 56% | 9% | 33% | 2% |

The environmental stories are printed in various form, the alarming point is the editorial space dedicated is 6% in The Hindu and 9% in Prajavani. The highest being the news report of 63% in The Hindu and 56% in Prajavani is covered in a month.

Placement of the environmental writings

| Newspaper | Front Page | Inner pages | Supplementary copies |
|-----------|------------|-------------|----------------------|
| The Hindu | 6% | 80% | 13% |
| Prajavani | 9% | 79% | 11% |

The significant point is the placement of the stories, in front page is about 6% of environmental stories in The Hindu and 9% of it was in Prajavani. As in the supplementary copy again The Hindu tops by 13% and Prajavani brings out with 11% of the in-depth articles, features and other forms of write ups.

CONCLUSION

Environment and sustainable development have gained a lot of attention due to education and political situations. One of the main reasons for the public to give more importance towards these issues is due to scarcity of water, electricity and climate change. Wildlife, conservation of forest, waste management and agriculture are also

focused on, especially by the youth. It is indeed of no doubt that newspapers cover these issues but the main problem seems to be that they do not provide proper background information or knowledge and solutions from which the people can benefit. They reported as news stories with the least possible information. The front page stories are occupied by other issues such as politics and crime whereas the least importance is given to environment issues.

When compared to regional language English papers seem to have provided more detailed information, proving that it is very necessary for regional language papers to concentrate more on environmental issues as most of them were very short news reports which did not provide much of awareness. Since the reach of regional language papers is more in a country like India, hence, it is essential that these papers provide as much as information possible to the people.

The newspapers need to focus more on publishing more opinions, features, articles and editorials since they provide in-depth knowledge regarding and issue and they may also prove to give solutions to the public.

The placement of the stories are also very poor especially in vernacular press, they are published in the inner pages, or in the corners where people do not seem to concentrate much. The English dailies seem to have a better placement compared to regional language papers since they have placed the stories on the top and most on the right hand side where people concentrate much. It can also be observed that the English dailies have strong and catchy headlines and bright photographs that attract the reader that were lacking in the local language papers. In terms of front page coverage both need to improve a lot.

Most of the news in the regional language has also been given a political frame in some or the other manner when compared with the English newspapers.

Although newspapers cover environmental and sustainable development issues such as pollution, scarcity of water, climate change, wildlife, conservation of forest, waste management and agriculture, there is lack of depth is found in Kannada newspapers. The journalists may be given orientation on environment journalism. Even in English Newspapers most of the issues are focussed on wildlife and conservation and the other issues are ignored.

The regional newspapers must carry articles and features so that they can explain the issues to the people better. It will also help in educating and persuading people towards sustainable development. It is essential that, the local news stories must increase the public interest in such issues as much as possible.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS:

- A dedicated page on 'Environmental Issues and Solution' should be published.
- Topics on sustainable development must be prioritized.

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