

# Role of Media in Conserving Environment

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**Abstract:** *Callous attitude of humans towards the environment has made it more vulnerable and pushed it to the cusp of acute crisis. Unless prudent measures are taken to curtail the degradation of environment then we are doomed to irreparable sufferings. Media can play a vital role in waking up people from their slumber as it is potential enough to deliver particular message to each and every door. This article analyses media's contribution towards safeguarding the environment.*

**Keywords:** Environmental issues, Media's defect, public insensitivity, needed promotion

## 1. Introduction

Safeguarding the environment is one of the major challenges faced by most of the major countries in the world. Though there are numerous laws drafted by the government in this regard, it lags in the efficient implementation of it. It is high time that government has to chalk out the plan to educate a common man about the implications of deteriorating environment and his/her role in safeguarding it. There are lot of NGOs who are actively doing their part in making the environment a better living place by the activities like planting trees, cleaning the polluted lakes and educating the masses on hygienic lifestyle etc.. When it comes to the role of media, it can be discerned that it is below partaking consideration of the influence it has towards the masses. Media have to make the comprehensive coverage of environmental issues which would help in preaching the common man on his/her role in building the cleaner environment with due responsibility.

## 2. Review of Literature

A study by Rong, Cheng (2009), "Newspaper coverage of environmental problems in China: An analysis of three Chinese newspapers" examined the coverage of environmental issues by three major newspapers in China, and found that all three newspapers' coverage of environmental problems and issues increased from July 2001 to June 2007. However, by examining the frequencies, article tones, article lengths, and geographic foci of each paper, I find obvious differences among the national Communist Party newspaper, the Beijing Party newspaper, and the Beijing non-Party newspaper. First, the two Party newspapers provide more coverage of environmental problems than does the non-Party newspaper. The Party newspapers often report environmental problem from a relatively positive perspective, while the non-Party newspaper is more likely to use a critical and negative perspective. Therefore, the Party newspapers seem to provide propaganda for the Party on the issues of environmental problems. Second, the Party newspapers' environmental coverage seems strongly influenced by the government's environmental policies and perspective.

The study by (Boykoff M, Mansfield M. 2008), "Ye Olde Hot Aire: reporting on human contributions to climate change in the UK tabloid press" examined how influential sources represent climate change for a heretofore understudied segment of U.K. citizenry. Through Critical

Discourse Analysis, investigations of framing and semistructured interviews, this project examined the claims and framing of climate change in four daily working class UK newspapers from 2000–2006, i.e., The Sun (and News of the World), the Daily Mail (and Mail on Sunday), the Daily Express (and Sunday Express), and the Mirror (and Sunday Mirror). Data showed that news articles on climate change were predominantly framed through weather events, charismatic megafauna, and the movements of political actors and rhetoric, whereas few stories focused on climate justice and risk. In addition, headlines with tones of fear, misery, and doom were most prevalent.

A Study by Randazzo, Ryan C. R (2001), "Context and bias in environmental journalism in the leading United States daily newspapers online vs. print: A content analysis" newspaper coverage of environmental issues, especially for lacking context and being biased. The development of the Internet has created new opportunities for newspapers to provide better environmental coverage. A content analysis examines what kinds and how much context is provided in environmental articles in five leading U.S. daily newspapers. It also examines how biased those articles are in terms of balancing both sides of controversies. Differences between print and online versions of the newspapers were examined. Environmental articles in the newspapers provide some of the types of context and largely exclude others. Newspapers don't often use the capabilities of the Web to provide more context online. Most articles were not adversarial, but those that were seldom presented a balanced representation of both sides of the issue and also provided less context than non-adversarial articles. Most online articles are identical to print with fewer visual elements.

A research by Archibald, Erika Francesca, (1996), on "How environmental reporters on daily newspapers construct news of the environment", made an exploratory analysis on daily newspaper reporters who cover the environmental beat, in order to learn how they operate and how they make certain crucial decisions. Long interviews were conducted with twenty environmental reporters from daily newspapers throughout the United States. Data analysis used the constant comparative method of open, axial and selective coding of the interview transcripts. In addition, 100 stories written by these reporters were studied, to look at the range of topics covered, news pegs and sources. The data suggested that topic selection by these reporters is influenced first by how their newspapers organize environmental coverage, and then by personal input. The reporters said they did not

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follow any standard routines for finding news and that they searched for stories that would be "relevant" to their readers. They said environmental topics generally took more time to do than other news stories. Problems these reporters faced included not enough time or space to understand, cover and write about these multi-level, subtle and often uncertain issues, and dealing with editors who have little interest in the environment and nontraditional news stories.

Craig Trumbo, (1996) on "Constructing climate change: claims and frames in US news coverage of an environmental issue", made an empirical content analysis of a decade of coverage of climate change in five national newspapers in the US is presented. The analysis is based on the perspective, drawn from social problems theory, that the content of news discourse can be understood in terms of claims-making and framing. Climate change is also discussed in terms of Downs' issue-attention cycle, a five-stage model describing the rise and fall of social attention to important issues. Climate change, as a news story, is described as exhibiting three phases that are related to the sources quoted and the frames presented in the news coverage. Result of the analysis shows that scientists tend to be associated with frames emphasizing problems and causes, while politicians and special interests tend to be associated with frames emphasizing judgments and remedies. Results also show how scientists declined as news sources as the issue became increasingly politicized.

Yuki Sampei, Midori Aoyagi-Usui (2009) examined analysed Japanese newspaper coverage of global warming from January 1998 to July 2007 and how public opinion during parts of that period were influenced by newspaper coverage. It shows a dramatic increase in newspaper coverage of global warming from January 2007 correlated with an increase in public concern for the issue. Before January 2007, it has found that coverage of global warming had an immediate but short-term influence on public concern. With such transitory high levels of media coverage we suggest that for more effective communication of climate change, strategies aimed at maintaining mass-media coverage of global warming are required.

A study by Daniel Adel (2013) on "Mainstream media's environmental coverage: The sound of silence" examined the report released by Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism to review a range of national and local news organizations across platforms from January 2011 to May 2012. The study showed that Among 30 national news organizations in the United States, environmental coverage represented just 1.2 percent of headlines. Meanwhile, entertainment and crime coverage continued to dominate the media space. For some news organizations, entertainment and crime garnered 20 to 60 times more coverage, respectively, than did the environment. The old newsroom maxim, *If it bleeds it leads*, still appears to grip many news organizations, despite the fact that most of the crime stories that suck up media attention have very little national relevance. The networks' morning shows carry an estimated 69 crime stories for each environmental story they do. The crime-to-environment coverage ratios are also dismal for other outlets: cable news, 9-to-1; online news, 6-to-1; evening network news, 5-to-1.

In discussing mass media influence, Bennett has commented, "Few things are as much a part of our lives as the news. It has become a sort of instant historical record of the pace, progress, problems, and hopes of society".

A study focusing on the US network television coverage in the 1990s suggests that environmental aspects have been largely absent from non-news entertainment and fictional prime time coverage (McComas et al. 2001).

Editorial decisions are frequently made on the amount of exposure and placement (front page or buried deep in the newspaper), as well as on the use of headlines and photographs. Economic considerations have limited funding for investigative journalism.

Communication is central to how we come to know, and to know about, the environment and environmental issues, and the major communication media are a central public arena through which we become aware of environmental issues and the way they are addressed, contested and resolved (Hansen, 2011, p.9).

A study by Keawkumnurpong and Jirapreeya, (1995) on "The Thai press media coverage of environmental issues", reviewed the Thai press coverage of environmental issues and to assess its role in promoting environmental awareness in Thailand. It focused on the periods before, during and following the United Nations Conference on the Environment held at Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The project depended on the coverages of four leading Thai newspapers, two in Thai (Mattichon and Puchatkarn) and two in English (Bangkok Post and The Nation). Quantitative, qualitative, comparative and content analyses were applied to the coverages of these newspapers. They concluded that the Thai press coverage of environmental issues was absent prior to the Conference. This fact did not change during and following the Conference, reflecting a feeble role in promoting environmental awareness in Thailand.

Guedes, O.M.R. (1996), on "Green politics, ideology and communication", made a detailed analysis of the Brazilian mass media, looking at how particular views of environmental issues are constructed and maintained by the media.

It analyses the production of environmental news through a combination of content analysis, case study and in-depth, semi-structured interviews with journalists to examine the way they see the characteristics of environmental reporting and its process of production. In addition, interviews with representatives of environmental groups, environmental experts, politicians and civil servants are included, focusing on the way they influence the media's work and on their perception of Brazilian environmental coverage.

The coverage of environmental issues has become slightly politicised, which can be associated with many different social, economic and scientific events in the last decade, but the general perspective has been shaped by the technocentric environmental perspective, which stresses traditional beliefs and values, emphasising progress, technology, production and materialism. Also the media reinforce the belief that

science is distinct from politics and beyond the clash of conflicting social values.

The study indicates that other environmental perspectives which would criticise the core of industrialism and the present status quo, do not receive the same amount of attention of the mass media.

### 3. Theory

#### Agenda Setting

**Agenda-setting theory** describes the "ability of the news media to influence the salience of topics on the public agenda. Agenda-setting theory was formally developed by Max McCombs and Donald Shaw in a study on the 1968 American presidential election. By comparing the salience of issues in news content with the public's perceptions of the most important election issue, McCombs and Shaw were able to determine the degree to which the media determines public opinion. The Agenda-Setting Theory says the media (mainly the news media) aren't always successful at telling us what to think, but they are quite successful at telling us what to think about.

#### Levels of agenda setting theory

##### First Level

Mostly studied by researchers, media uses objects or issues to influence the people what people should think about.

##### Second level

Media focuses on the characters of issues how people should think about. Agenda setting theory used in political ad, campaigns, business news, PR (public relation) etc.

The main concept associated with the agenda setting theory is gate keeping. Gate keeping controls over the selection of content discussed in the media; Public cares mostly about the product of a media gate keeping. It is especially editors media itself is a gatekeeper. News media decides 'what' events to admit through media 'gates' on ground of 'newsworthiness'.

#### Gatekeeping

Gatekeeping is the process through which information is filtered for dissemination, whether for publication, broadcasting, the Internet, or some other mode of communication. The academic theory of gatekeeping is founded in multiple fields of study, including communication studies, journalism, political science, and sociology. It was originally focused on the mass media with its few-to-many dynamic but now gatekeeping theory also addresses face-to-face communication and the many-to-many dynamic inherent in the Internet. The theory was first instituted by social psychologist Kurt Lewin in 1943.

#### Research questions

What role do media play in creating environmental awareness? What are their weaknesses, what their chances? What could be done to enhance their effectiveness in raising the level of consciousness of ecological problems?

#### Methods

This study is based upon extensive review of books, journals, articles, as well as results from many researches on environmental coverage in media.

### 4. Discussions

#### Environment

All the biological and non-biological entities surrounding us are included in an environment. Air, water and the land surrounding us constitute our environment, and influence us directly. At the same time we too have an environment by overuse or over-exploitation of resources by the discharge of pollutants in the air, water and land. The environment is one subject that is actually global as well as local in nature. Issues like global warming, depletion of the ozone layer, dwindling forests and energy resources, loss of global biodiversity etc which are going to affect the mankind as a whole are global in nature and for that we have to think and plan globally.

#### Public Awareness for Environment

The goal of Sustainable development cannot be achieved by any government at its own level until the public has a participatory role in it. Public participation is possible only when the public is aware about the ecological and environmental issues.

The public has to be educated about the fact that if we are degrading our environment, we are actually harming our own selves. This is because we are a part of the complex network of environment where component is linked up. It is all the more important to educate the people that sometimes the adverse impact of environment are not experienced until a threshold is reached.

A drive by the government to ban the littering of polythene cannot be successful until the public understands the environmental implications of the same. The public has to be made aware that by littering polythene, we are not only damaging the environment but posing serious threats to our health

There is a Chinese proverb "If you plan for one year, plant rice, if you plan for 10 years, plant trees and if you plan for 100 years to educate people". If we want to protect and manage our planet earth on a sustainable basis, we have no option but to make all persons environmentally educated.

Mass media perform a special function by exposing individuals to new people, ideas and attitudes which could induce a change in people. These Mass Media are major force which can bring a remedy for environmental issues by prominent and frequent coverage of environmental news. Science media has a wide reach, it is possible to put some motivation among the people on saving the Environment. It should be socially responsible to make the world better place.

#### Role of an individual in prevention of pollution

The role of every individual in preventing pollution is of paramount importance because if every individual contributes substantially the effect will be visible not only in



the community, city, state or national level but also at the global level as the environment has no boundaries. It is the responsibility of the human race, which has occupied the commanding position on this earth to protect the earth and provide a conducive environment for itself and innumerable other species which evolved on this earth. A small effort made by each individual in his own place will have pronounced effect at the global level. It is aptly said, "Think Globally, act locally".

#### **Sustainable development**

Until now development has been human-oriented, that too mainly for a few rich nations. They have touched the greatest heights of scientific and technological development, but at what cost? The air we breathe, the water we drink and the food we eat have all been badly polluted. Our natural resources are just dwindling due to over exploitation. If growth continues in the same way, very soon we will be facing a "doom's day" Meadows et al (1972).

India has still to go a long way in implementing the concept of sustainable development. We have to lay emphasis on framing a well-planned strategy for our development activity while increasing our economic growth. We have tremendous natural diversity as well as a huge population which makes planning for sustainable growth all the more important and complex.

#### **Urban problems related to energy**

Cities are the main centers of economic growth, trade, education, innovations and employment. Until, recently, a big majority of human population lived in rural areas and their economic activities centered on agriculture, cattle rearing, fishing, hunting or some cottage industry. It was some 200 years ago, with the dawn of the industrial era, the cities showed a rapid development. Now about 50 percent of the world population lives in urban areas and there is increasing movement of rural folk to cities in search of employment. The urban growth is so fast that it is becoming difficult to accommodate all the industrial, commercial and residential facilities within a municipal boundary.

The energy requirements of the urban population are much higher than that of rural ones. This is because urban people have a much higher standard of life and their lifestyle demands more energy inputs in every sphere of life. The energy demanding activities include:

- 1) Residential and commercial lighting.
- 2) Transportation means, including automobiles and public transport for moving from residence to workplace
- 3) Modern lifestyle using a large number of electrical gadgets in everyday life.
- 4) Industrial plants using a big proportion of energy.
- 5) Due to high population density and high energy demanding activities, the urban problems related to energy are much more magnified and compared to the rural population.

## **5. Role of Mass Media in spreading Environmental Awareness**

#### **Newspapers**

Newspapers continue to be the predominant medium in influencing the people for ages and can play a bigger role in protecting the environment. Though newspapers cover the environmental issues the much needed focus is not given on consistent basis. It is the sensational crime or hot politics that takes its place as the highest coverage most often since these are the topics which attracts more readers, by and large every paper goes with this trend. Environment is a basic need for all living beings because every necessity for them depends on the environment. Unless the environment is protected, the existence of life on the planet Earth would be impossible.

Though many talks of environment, only few have clear ideas about what needs to be done to conserve it. Here newspapers can play a stronger role by allotting some prominent space for the environmental cause on regular basis and educate the common man on environmental conservation and help in making a big leap in environmental conservation.

#### **Television**

Television is visual and auditory, and therefore doesn't require viewers to be literate. It has the potential to be free, besides the initial costs for obtaining a television. Television is still ageless in the sense that anyone from any walk of life can use it, and most importantly, anyone is able to comprehend the contents that are being emitted from the television. Television programming uses storytelling or engaging narratives to capture people's attention. Television, unlike print media, due largely to literacy, and film, due to financial accessibility, has a lower threshold for consumption. According to Gerbner, television has become the "central cultural arm of our society."

Television is one of the most powerful and effective means of communication in influencing and persuading people. Television programs join the members of the house and makes them to enjoy time together. With this power of joining people, television can do a lot in improving the environmental awareness among the people. But primary contents which occupies the television channels are entertainment related which can expand the viewership.

Television scores high among the media in terms of public interest due to its visual and auditory attributes and acts as a strong medium in carrying a particular message to masses. Television programs join the members of the house and makes them to enjoy time together. With this power of joining people, television can do a lot in improving the environmental awareness among the people. But primary contents which occupies the television channels are entertainment related which can expand the viewership. Television is in the world of complete commercialization, either it is a reality show or a mega serials that fill the slots! the intention of the media is to gain profit. It is the entertainment, politics and the news on celebrities takes the higher coverage, which are proven as higher TRP contents as well. Commercialization is not

restricted only to advertisements but it is also held within the program content. Television channels are obsessed with financial gains in each and every program they broadcast. It can contribute highly to society by developing a broader vision towards educating a common man about the dos and don'ts that would uplift the standard of the environment and hold the earth from peril. Though there are programs which are environmental centric, it is very few and meagre considering the need of the hour.

### Radio

Radio is an affordable and easily accessible medium. Its signals cover almost the whole country. Government channels in radio medium does a better job in promoting the social and environmental awareness than filling the contents with entertainment. After the birth of FM stations radio has become more commercial. Though the services work for 24/7, most of the times FM station covers film songs, announcements and talk shows. Messages on social concerns are rarely seen. FM channels should take steps in ameliorating the environmental conditions by providing influential and frequential messages on Environmental protection. Due to the high level of illiteracy in India, electronic media are in a key position in bringing a change in the minds of the people. Furthermore, inquiries have shown that both radio and television are perceived as authoritative and friendly media by vast percentages of the population. radio is well below its potential in creating environmental awareness and over the last few years no increase in broadcasts on environment can be observed.

## 6. Conclusion

The Health of an environment has not been in good shape and recklessness towards it would lead to serious and irreparable repercussions putting future generations in great jeopardy. Constructive measures to improve it or stop it from further deterioration is the need of the hour. Lack of awareness among the people and callous attitude towards the nature's attributes to decline in environmental health. Media can play a vital role in creating awareness among the people on healthy habits that will boost the environmental health. Media should come out of their TRP centric coverage a little and become more responsible by making an comprehensive coverage of environmental issues on a consistent basis which would reform the attitude of the people towards the nature.

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