



Role Of Electronic Media In Promoting Environmental Sustainability In India

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Abstract: This research paper aims to explore the role of electronic media, specifically television, in promoting environmental awareness, development, literacy, social awareness, and political consciousness, with a focus on contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The study investigates how India's English-language electronic media represent environmentally sustainable development activities and compares the level of environmental reporting among five prominent news channels: DD News, CNN-News 18, NDTV 24x7, Times Now and Republic TV. Furthermore, the paper examines media's understanding of environmental sustainability, their coverage of related issues, and the level of responsibility they assume in this regard.

Keywords - Environmental awareness, climate change, environmental sustainability, electronic media, Television News, SDGs

I. INTRODUCTION

India, accounting for 2.4 per cent of the world's land area, supports a staggering 16 per cent of the global population (Kumar 2023). Unfortunately, like many other nations, India is grappling with the challenges posed by climate change. Consequently, the country's natural resources have been exploited in an unsustainable manner for several generations, leading to severe environmental degradation. The burden on India's land and resources has become overwhelming due to the massive population overgrowth.

The repercussions of this environmental degradation are substantial, with India facing an annual loss of \$87 billion (Kulkarni, 2022). For instance, in 2014, the government sanctioned \$137 million to address the devastating floods in Kashmir (India Today 2016), and an additional \$11 billion was allocated for compensating the damages caused by cyclone 'Hudhud' (The Economic Times 2015). Climate change has also begun to impact agricultural productivity, as projected by the Agriculture Ministry's report presented to a parliamentary committee. The report suggests that numerous crops may experience a decrease in yield due to climate change, although soybean, Bengal gram, groundnut, coconut (on the West coast), and potato (in Punjab, Haryana, and western Uttar Pradesh) could potentially see improvements. The ministry also believes that altering farming practices to adapt to climate change could increase crop yields by 10 to 40 per cent after 2021. Nevertheless, as of today, some states in the Northeast and northern India are grappling with floods, while suffocating heatwaves torment the western region (Gupta and Pathak 2016).

A government report titled 'India Habitat III-National Report,' released by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation, emphasizes the pressing need to strike a balance between India's projected growth trajectory and environmental sustainability. The report acknowledges that India faces significant environmental challenges triggered by extreme weather conditions, necessitating substantial adjustments in urban planning, land-use management, and infrastructure strategies and norms (The Hindu 2016).

Undoubtedly, the environment versus development debate has been at the forefront of Indian discourse for the past two decades. Pollution remains a major issue, intricately linked with the challenges of development. While progress is imperative, effective pollution control measures must also be implemented to safeguard humanity. The Kyoto Protocol recognized the principle that countries emitting higher levels of carbon into the atmosphere bear greater responsibility for saving the world. However, this principle is now under scrutiny (UNFCCC 2023). Merely expressing concern about the deteriorating state of water, air, forests, and the sky on Environment Day is insufficient. The Indian Government's aspirations to enhance infrastructure and achieve higher economic growth rates have encountered obstacles due, in part, to disputes over environmental policies and land ownership.

In this context, the media plays a crucial role in raising awareness about environmental sustainability and driving action to protect the environment. This study focuses on examining the current and potential impact of electronic media in promoting environmental awareness.

II. ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND MEDIA

The role of electronic media in fostering public understanding of environmental issues is significant. Solving today's complex local and global environmental challenges and progressing towards sustainability cannot solely rely on "experts." It requires the active involvement and support of an informed public in their various capacities as consumers, voters, employers, business leaders, and community members, as emphasized by the Canadian Environmental Grantmakers' Network (2006).

Mass media, including electronic media, have become indispensable partners in global biodiversity conservation and management. They serve multiple roles, not only by raising awareness about environmental problems and the challenges associated with achieving sustainability but also by influencing human perception, attitudes, and behaviour towards environmental resources (Ogunjinm et al., 2013). However, in India, there have been limited systematic studies examining the extent, quality, breadth, and public perceptions of media coverage related to environmental sustainability. One such study conducted by Kapoor (2011) focused on the role of mass media in promoting environmental issues in the city of Allahabad in Uttar Pradesh. The study concluded that there is an urgent need for effective mass communication strategies to generate environmental awareness (Kapoor, 2011).

The media has always been recognized for its significant role in society, as it serves as a vital source of information that shapes people's understanding and perception of the world they inhabit (UNESCO, 2011). Consequently, the media can play a crucial role in raising awareness about environmental sustainability and its associated impacts. This study aims to assess the credibility of English-language news channels in promoting awareness of environmental sustainability. It will investigate how India's English-language electronic media portray activities related to sustainable development and analyse which TV news channel demonstrates a greater commitment to environmental reporting compared to its counterparts. Television news channels play a dual role in addressing environmental sustainability issues. On one hand, they serve as platforms to explain environmental policies, regulations, and plans to the public. On the other hand, they reflect the concerns of the public regarding various environmental problems, thereby exerting pressure on decision-makers to address specific environmental issues (Prakash, 2013).

III. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Television serves as an influential medium to disseminate information and shape public opinion. By analysing the representation of environmentally sustainable development activities on English-language news channels in India, this study aims to shed light on the media's role in promoting sustainable development. The Sustainable Development Goals, adopted by the United Nations, provide a comprehensive framework for addressing global challenges, including environmental sustainability. This research investigates the extent to which the media contributes to these goals through their coverage of environmental issues. Television serves as a powerful medium for promoting environmental awareness, development, literacy, social consciousness, and political engagement. It plays a crucial role as the primary source of information for the general public. Therefore, it carries the responsibility of setting the agenda on environmental issues and prioritizing them accordingly. However, a review of documents related to environmental evaluation and annual reports reveals a lack of comprehensive recognition of awareness creation regarding these issues in electronic media.

Furthermore, the researcher firmly believes that policymakers and implementers should be aware of how environmental awareness activities have been carried out, their progress since their inception, and their successes and failures. Without this understanding, it is impossible to ensure progress in mitigating the causes and consequences of environmental problems in development activities. Considering the aforementioned context, the problem that requires investigation is the actual and potential role of television news channels in terms of their commitment to raising awareness about environmental issues. There is a necessity to assess the contribution of electronic media in achieving sustainable development goals.

IV. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. **Assessing the role of electronic media in raising awareness of environmental sustainability issues:** The study aims to examine the extent to which electronic media, particularly television news channels, contribute to creating awareness about environmental sustainability. It will explore the coverage and representation of these issues to determine the effectiveness of the media in promoting environmental awareness among the general public.
2. **Analysing the time allocation for environmental sustainability issues:** The study seeks to investigate the amount of airtime dedicated to environmental sustainability topics by television news channels. By analysing the duration and frequency of coverage, it aims to assess the priority given to environmental sustainability issues in the media agenda.
3. **Examining the current status of television news content on environmental sustainability:** The study will assess the quality and depth of television news content related to environmental sustainability issues. It will analyse the themes, perspectives, and approaches taken while reporting on these topics, providing insights into the current state of environmental sustainability coverage in the media.

By addressing these objectives, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role and effectiveness of electronic media, specifically television news channels, in creating awareness of environmental sustainability issues.

V. METHODOLOGY

The study utilizes a qualitative research design, employing content analysis as the primary method. A sample of five English-language news channels in India, namely DD News, CNN-News 18, NDTV 24x7, Times Now, and Republic TV, was selected for analysis. A systematic approach is employed to examine the channels' coverage of environmentally sustainable development activities over a specific period. The analysis focuses on understanding the media's interpretation of environmental sustainability, the depth and breadth of their coverage, and the level of responsibility they assume in addressing these issues.

The study employed the following methodology for data collection and analysis:

Selection of news channels: The five English-language news channels, namely DD News, CNN-News18, Republic TV, Times Now, and NDTV 24x7 were chosen based on their viewership, longevity, and popularity. These channels represent a diverse range of news sources.

Focus on Prime-Time programming: Primetime programming, which typically spans from 8 to 11 pm, was selected as the time period for data collection. This time slot is considered the industry benchmark for news channels and attracts a significant viewership.

Data collection: A two-week period, specifically from 1st to 14th June 2023 was chosen for data collection. This timeframe includes World Environment Day (celebrated on June 5 every year), which allows for an examination of how news channels prioritize environmental sustainability-related coverage. The researcher watched several programs during this period, as well as reviewed content directly from the YouTube channels of the selected news channels.

Categorization of news stories: The reviewed news content was categorized into various predefined categories such as politics, business, sports, environment, crime, and others. The researchers then specifically reviewed and classified the news stories related to environmental sustainability as a separate category.

By following this procedure, the study collected and analysed data from the selected news channels to determine the extent of coverage and focus on environmental sustainability-related issues during the designated prime time period.

VI. ANALYSIS OF NEWS COVERAGE AND FINDINGS

The findings of the content analysis provide insights into how India's English-language electronic media represent environmentally sustainable development activities. The study examines the frequency, quality, and diversity of coverage across the selected news channels. By comparing the channels, it identifies which one exhibits a higher degree of environmental reporting and engagement. The analysis also explores the media's understanding of environmental sustainability, the strategies employed in covering related issues, and the level of responsibility they perceive in the context of sustainable development.

Based on the trend of environmental news coverage from 1st to 14th June 2023, the following observations were made:

1. **Accident & Natural Disaster coverage:** This category received the highest coverage among environmental issues during the mentioned period. It indicates that incidents related to accidents and natural disasters were extensively covered by the news channels.
2. **Active coverage by Times Now, Republic TV & CNN News 18:** These three news channels were particularly active in providing broader coverage of environmental issues during the mentioned timeframe.
3. **Weather, Environment & Wildlife coverage:** These topics received an average level of coverage across all four channels. However, CNN News 18 had a slight edge over the others in terms of coverage in these categories.
4. **Minimal coverage on Agriculture:** The issue of agriculture had the least coverage among the environmental topics during the specified period. It suggests that agricultural-related environmental concerns received relatively less attention from the news channels.
5. **Highest coverage by NDTV 24x7:** NDTV 24x7 had the highest overall coverage of environmental issues during prime time. It indicates that this news channel dedicated more airtime to environmental news compared to the others.
6. **In terms of the total primetime devoted to environmental issues,** NDTV 24x7 had the maximum coverage, followed by CNN News 18, Republic TV, and Times Now.

These findings provide insights into the trends and priorities of the selected news channels in their coverage of environmental issues during the specified period. The current study has yielded the following findings:

1. **Minimal coverage of environmental sustainability issues:** Environmental sustainability issues accounted for only approximately 0.35% of the news coverage on popular English news channels. This indicates a lack of emphasis and attention given to these issues in the media.
2. **Limited focus on environmental sustainability:** The analysis of trends in coverage during the period of 1st to 14th June 2023 revealed that news channels rarely prioritized environmental sustainability issues, except for coverage related to World Environment Day. This suggests a lack of consistent focus on these topics.
3. **The dominance of AV format in coverage:** A significant finding from the analysis of TV shows was that 68% of the stories on environmental sustainability issues were aired in the last segment as AV

(Anchor Visual) format. This format allows for a limited in-depth and comprehensive exploration of environmental sustainability issues.

VII. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study is limited to five English-language news channels in India and focuses specifically on their coverage of environmentally sustainable development activities. Future research could expand the scope to include regional language channels and investigate the coverage of other SDGs. Additionally, a comparative analysis with international news channels would provide a broader perspective on the representation of sustainable development in the media. Finally, conducting audience research to assess the impact of media coverage on public awareness and engagement with environmental sustainability could further enrich the understanding of the media's role in promoting sustainable development.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that there was insufficient emphasis and coverage given to environmental sustainability issues in the media. The limited attention and brief coverage indicate a lack of necessary skills and training among journalists in understanding and reporting on environmental sustainability concepts. The editorial policies of news channels may contribute to the inadequate and inconsistent coverage of environmental sustainability topics on television.

Furthermore, it is crucial to identify the obstacles to environmental awareness and conduct comprehensive research to determine the most effective ways for the media to address environmental issues based on the country's specific context. Training programs should be implemented to equip journalists with the necessary knowledge and understanding of environmental sustainability issues.

Overall, these findings highlight the need for greater attention, emphasis, and training within the electronic media industry to effectively cover and report on environmental sustainability issues. By understanding how India's English-language news channels cover environmentally sustainable development activities, media organizations, policymakers, and other stakeholders can gain insights into the strengths and weaknesses of current media practices. These insights can inform strategies to enhance the media's contribution to achieving Sustainable Development Goals and fostering a more environmentally conscious society.

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