

Role of media during environmental crisis in India. (With special reference to Delhi smog)

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Abstract-

Environment is one of the major components of this earth. And it has been witnessing continuous change with the passage of time. With many technological advances and heavy consumption of natural resources, environmental conservation and sustainable development have assumed importance like never before. The role played by media has become undeniable towards the rising concerns about sensitizing the public and spreading awareness about conserving the environment.

The mass media could play a critical role in shaping the public debate on environmental issues in India. But the environmental coverage in both print and broadcast media has been limited relative to the huge size of the nation's environmental problems. Remedying the media's neglect of the environment presents a difficult but interesting challenge to ecological advocates, both inside and outside the government, in their efforts to increase public awareness of the social costs of environmental degradation.

The present study is planned to analyze how media has been handling its responsibility in highlighting the actual cause behind the issues of Delhi smog. The coverage given to this particular environmental issue by major media houses in India will be quantified and analyzed to discover how much importance was attached to the issue by the media. The paper will also analyze the themes reported by the media to attain to overcome this issue.

This paper will deal with various aspects and study the manner in which media covers Delhi smog issue which is seems to be a serious environmental crisis in India. The researcher will used the qualitative research method for this particular research.

Keywords- Media, environment, crisis, India, disaster

Introduction

Environment is one of the major components of this earth. The environment offers us so many benefits that we can never repay our entire lifetime. Yet, mankind for its own vested interests have turned a blind eye towards the preservation and safe keeping of the environment. With technological advances and the heavy consumption of natural resources, environmental conservation and sustainable development have assumed importance like never before.

One can describe Environmental Crisis as a dramatic, unexpected, and irreversible worsening of the environment leading to significant welfare losses. With rapid development, today modern humanity faces numerous problems. Massive industrialization and the rapid growth of the population are the key reasons for these ongoing problems. In fact, these problems are interdependent. For example, the growing population can cause the social problems like poverty, which in its turn causes the extreme exploitation of the natural resources and contributes to environmental pollution. This chain of logical connections may be formulated as the environmental crisis. The environmental crisis is not a negative forecast for the distant future, but as a matter of fact, it is the most current and ongoing problem at the global level.

Among all the other concerns in environmental crisis, climate change is a major one. The climate change occurs as a result of anthropogenic factors, mainly greenhouse gas pollution. Modern technological is highly depended on burning fossil fuels at factories, agricultural facilities, and pastorals. Various human activities also contributes to the destruction of green forests, which results in flooding, poor quality of the air and disruption of the natural ecological systems. The visible results of the climate change are the changes in global mean surface temperature, ocean circulation, sea level, species distribution, and precipitation patterns. Degraded air quality is the another concern associated with the climate change. The degraded air quality affects people and contributes to many diseases, including cancer, cardiovascular disease, and respiratory diseases. Approximately 1 billion of people live in industrial areas with poor air quality. The most affected territories with poor air quality are India, China, and Western-Pacific region. In these regions, almost 6 million deaths are caused due to the air pollution. Besides, low productivity of land is the result of air pollution.

At the global level, there has been considerable anxiety towards natural disasters. In 1989, the decade 1990-2000 was declared the International Decade by United Nations General Assembly. This declaration was made for the Reduction of natural disaster with the objective to reduce loss of lives and property and restrict socio-economic damage through concerted international action for appropriate management strategies, especially in the developing countries. In India, many natural disasters have caused havoc to the life and property of citizens and nature as a whole from time to time. Amongst all the natural disasters, floods and earthquakes are the most common in India. Due to large population growth and large scale migration of population into urban areas, floods, droughts, cyclones, earthquakes and landslides

have been recurrent phenomena in India. In the southern part of India, states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala, have been witness to catastrophe caused by cyclones, storms, tsunamis surging in the coastal regions, earthquakes, monsoon flash floods and landslides. The multi-day cloudburst centered on the North Indian state of Uttarakhand caused devastating floods and landslides resulting in the country's one of the worst natural disaster. These states are no exception in India. Eastern states of Assam, Bihar and Orissa bear the brunt of nature every year in form of monsoon floods and cyclones. Even the national capital also suffers from severe air pollution from last couple of years due to the careless activities of mankind.

In November 2016, Delhi residents faced to deadly smog, with the particulate matter which was 15 times higher than safe levels. This record-breaking toxicity put at risk the lives of approximately 25 million people. During a five-day period, the state government took many actions to combat the worst effects, including closing of all schools, halting all construction projects, banning diesel generators, except those in hospitals, and even sprinkling water on the streets. Supreme Court addressed the problem with a temporary ban on the sale of firecrackers in Delhi, just before Diwali, the most important Hindu festival in North India. Many news reports mentioned that despite the ban, Delhi residents burned firecrackers, and because of this air quality in some places exceeded hazardous levels again. Delhi consistently exceeds the most threatening levels of hazardous air pollution by almost 10 times, the worst among all those measured . In 2014, Delhi surpassed Beijing as the city with the worst air pollution in the world. And it has worsened in recent years: There is now twice as much suspended particulate in Delhi as there was in the early 1990s. Outdoor air pollution is now the fifth largest killer in India, with almost 620,000 premature annual deaths due to air pollution-related diseases.

According to World Health Organization, 2016, air pollution has become the leading cause of cancer and a major cause of respiratory infections, heart disease, and lung cancer. Outdoor pollution resulted for almost 3 million deaths worldwide, mostly in developing countries (World Health Organization, 2016). Despite this serious health risk, and growing concern around the world, Indian media were not highly successful in framing the issue of air pollution. Frames in media influence how the public defines a social problem, and they set the agenda for policy makers to address such issues. Media frames help build ideas of how the public attributes causes and responsibility for solutions to such a problem. Understanding this phenomenon will help media companies, health communications practitioners and policy makers clarify the causes and solutions to the public.

Environmental awareness is to understand the delicacy of our environment and the importance of its protection. Promoting environmental awareness is an easy way to become an environmental representative and participate in creating a brighter future for our children. To define environmental awareness one must understand the environmentalist movement. It is the necessity and responsibility of humans to respect, protect, and preserve the natural world from its anthropogenic (caused by humans) afflictions.

The news media can play a powerful role in shaping public opinion and setting agendas for clean air. News reporting can build an understanding of the causes, consequences and potential solutions for air pollution, and, through frequent and prominent reporting, it can help to establish certain issues as urgent public priorities. Conversely, when news reporting is inaccurate, it can perpetuate misunderstandings and misdirect the public's support for solutions. Hence, to ensure that the public is appropriately informed and provided with the necessary information to be effectively engaged and to demand evidence-based policies, it is important to understand the current state of news media reportage and to engage with the news media, as a critical stakeholder, to advance evidence-based public policy.

During the past three decades, news media have become influential translators of environmental issues linking science, policy, and the citizenry. Historical trends in public discourse—shaped in significant part by elite media—demonstrate news media's critical role in shaping public perception and the level of concern towards environmental issues. Media representations of climate change and global warming are embedded in social, cultural, political, and economic dimensions that influence individual-level processes such as everyday journalistic practices. Media also have a proven strong influence on policy decision-making, attitudes, perspectives, intentions, and behavioral change. **But** those connections can be challenging to pinpoint; consequently, examinations of elite news coverage of climate change, particularly in recent decades, have sought to gain a stronger understanding of these complex and dynamic webs of interactions.

Most of us depend on the media to help make sense of the deluge of information presented to us, especially information about environmental risks, technologies, and initiatives. As noted by Schudson (1982): “The power of media lies not only (and not even primarily) in its power to declare things to be true, but in the power to provide the form in which the declaration appears. News in a newspaper or on television has a relationship to the “real world”, not only in content but in form; that is, in the way the world is incorporated into unquestionable and unnoticed conventions of narrations, and then transfigured no longer for discussion, but as a premise of any convention at all.” Just as Kuhn (1996) states that changing the perspective or dominant paradigm changes the picture sketched by the empirical evidence, the transfer of information from media to individuals also changes the picture of reality. Considerable evidence since the 1970's has shown that journalists play a key role in shaping our picture of the world as they go about their daily task of choosing and reporting the news (Bryant and Zillmann, 1986). According to Schiller (1973), the American media managers are mind managers that create a false sense of reality and produce a consciousness that cannot comprehend or willfully reject the actual conditions of life, personal or social. In Schiller's book *The Mind Managers*, he quotes Paulo Freire who states that manipulation of human minds “is an instrument of conquest”, and is one of the means by which “the dominant elites try to conform the masses

to their objectives.” Schiller continues to describe the United States as a divided society in which manipulation is one of the chief instruments of control in the hands of a small governing group of corporate and governmental decision-makers. According to many researchers, the media is a great and important influence in our society. Media can promote and inhibit social change of which values and attitudes toward the environment and environmental Each day journalists go through the same routine with the news. First, they decide which news to cover and report. Second, all the available reports are assessed, on which a typical day a newspaper will reject over 75% of the potential news. Once the information passes through, the journalists need to assess what type of treatment these topics will policy has changed (Neuzil and Kovarik, 1996). Therefore, the media should be addressed in understanding the lack of knowledge about global warming in our society and the lack of importance attributed to global warming. Who determines what we see and hear in the media? How is this information filtered? Who provides the information to the media? Why is a story covered? These are all important questions to understanding the extent of environmental coverage by the media. We begin to answer these questions by identifying those factors that are involved in filtering the news stories, which include the following gatekeepers that may represent industry perspectives: reporters/journalists, advertisers, and corporate owners.

The present study is planned to analyze how media has been handling its responsibility in highlighting the actual cause behind the issues of Delhi smog. The coverage given to this particular environmental issue by major media houses in India will be quantified and analyzed to discover how much importance this issue has received at the hands of media. The paper will also analyze the themes reported by the media in an attempt to overcome this issue. This paper will deal with various aspects and study the manner in which media covers Delhi smog issue which seems to be a serious environmental crisis in India.

Objectives-

The main objectives of this paper are

1. To study the media's role towards disaster issues
2. To study the media's coverage of Delhi smog

Research methodology

The researcher has implied qualitative method. Therefore the researcher used only secondary data for this research. Here the secondary data included only the media coverage of the Delhi smog issues of India which are available on various books, magazines, research paper and internet. The researcher will select all the different types of media while covering this Delhi smog issue. Through the content analysis the researcher tries to find out how media of India

presented such environmental issues. Apart from that researcher through this research paper will also give insights about the consequences of such coverage of media.

Data collection and analysis-

Media and Environmental issues

With circulation growing each year, India has a successful newspaper business. Though Hindi newspapers have a larger reader base, English newspapers come a close second. With the age of new media technology in India, Indian newspapers have invested in digital media, and most of the major newspapers now publish an online version of their paper. The Indian media always plays an important role in shaping social norms, policies and politics. Indeed, recent studies have demonstrated how media content in India has shaped discussions around issues like disaster

Management of air quality in India is primarily the responsibility of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change and is regulated under the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act 1981. The Central Pollution Control Board, along with its state counterparts, is the designated authority for the management of air quality. However, as the harmful health effects of air pollution have become increasingly clear, the role of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare as an active advocate for clean air in the interest of human health has increased. Indeed, there has been some recognition of this in India, as the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has established an innovative high-level multisectoral steering committee on air pollution, which has formulated a set of recommendations for coordinated actions to reduce the major sources of air pollution and to strengthen the existing health infrastructure and capacity to mitigate its health impacts.

The media plays a very important role in shaping public awareness about global climate change and associated actions. When we discuss about role of media, we need to focus on three key issues which are to inform, to educate and to entertain. Traditionally, radio, television and newspapers which have been playing an important role for spreading awareness among the people for climate change and environment protection at the faster rate than the personal contacts. Further they have been enriched by the production and distribution of printed materials such as books magazines and brochure which has helped in transfer of new and current awareness whereas radio and television are important tools for quick information.

Environmental reporting is a focused subject now. A media person can give general knowledge about waste disposal or anniversary activities concerning the environment. In 1983 China published its first newspaper on the environment, and the first publishing house on environmental science was set up in 1980. India's most popular newspapers like The Times of India, The Hindu, Hindustan Times and The Indian Express have an article on environmental issues at least every second day.

The environmental magazine like “Down to Earth” had been found to cover a broad variety of environment related topics and their scientific background. This magazine has informed and inspired people about environmental threats facing India and the world -- a dimension underplayed in mainstream media. Circulation figures are not a true indicator of the wide reach of the magazine: Down to Earth has become a reading habit in 400 out of about 500 districts of the country - which is more than any other Indian newspaper or magazine.

Media's coverage of Delhi smog

The major cause of Delhi smog was the **burning of crops** by the farmers from the neighbouring states of Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. At the end of the Kharif season, farmers burn rice stubbles before commencing the planting of crops for the Rabi season. The wind directs the smoke towards Delhi and worsens the already polluted atmospheric air. The smog in Delhi traps the pollutants and dust particles and makes it difficult to breathe. Though Delhi has a high number of environmentally friendly CNG-run buses but in spite of this, the air pollution due to vehicular emission is tremendous. It is because of the reduced green cover over Delhi. The past two decades have seen a rampant growth of real estate all over the city. The dust particles get trapped in the cold and damp air thereby affecting weather conditions. It results in the development of smog all over the area. It reduces visibility to a great extent. As a result, there were numerous vehicular accidents on the highways. It is a collective malaise in many cities in India. The release of industrial wastes into the air and water is one of the primary reasons for air pollution. Dumping and burning of garbage contribute broadly as well. The Delhi Government did its best to curb air pollution by banning cracker sales. However, religious fervor saw people bursting crackers and worsening the already polluted air.

Respiratory diseases are on a sharp rise in Delhi which is predominantly contributed by the dangerous level of air pollution in the city. While some attribute this to the careless use of firecrackers during Diwali, other factors could be burning of solid waste in and around Delhi, vehicular emissions, dust by the roadside and around construction sites in Delhi and stubble burning in Punjab and Haryana. While Delhi state government has compared Delhi to a gas chamber, the central government declared measures such as schools being closed for three days, no construction and demolition work for the 10 days in Delhi and NCR region to control the situation.

Almost 200 news stories on the issue of air pollution among the six newspapers were published in the year 2016. Most of these news items appeared in November. Hindustan Times has given wide coverage and Dainik Bhaskar covered almost 15 news items in its different pages. Among these news items only a few articles were written on editorial pages. The Hindu newspaper has published maximum number of edit articles written on the issue Hindustan and Dainik Jagran also published two editorials each during the period of this analysis.

The researcher went through total 40 articles and news stories which are published in the year 2019. Deccan herald, Times of India, the Hindu, the Economics times, Live mint, CBS news, The Washington post etc were the newspaper who published in various stories on this particular

issue. Here some of the stories dealt with the possibilities of how to tackle this Delhi pollution. India Today reported that the average AQI of Delhi from January 1 to November 4 this year was 195. The same figure for 2018 was 204. With a reduction of 9 points or 4 per cent for 2019, the average AQI has improved from 'poor' to 'moderate'. Between 2018 and 2019, the number of 'good' days went up from 0 to 2, 'satisfactory' days (AQI 51-100) rose from 53 to 57 and the number of days with 'moderate' AQI (101-200) rose from 103 to 118. Thus the number of days with good to moderate air quality rose by 21 days.

Over the year, there was an increase in the number of news stories on air pollution in India in the national media. Some stories described the risk to health from air pollution as moderately to extremely severe. And almost 393 stories described the situation as needing urgent action. A very limited information was provided on the kinds of illnesses that can result from exposure. The common illnesses resulting from air pollution stories published in either media were less than 30%. A very few articles mentioned the population groups most at risk from air pollution, such as children or older people. In India vehicles were presented most often as the cause of air pollution (in over 50% of articles in both national and international media). Some of the most important sources of air pollution were mentioned less often: 6% of national and 18% of international media articles mentioned unclean sources of household energy; 3% of national and 9% of international media articles mentioned agricultural field burning. At last, the majority of articles did not mention any specific institution or organization – such as the government or industry groups – as the primary responsible stakeholder, thus leaving ambiguous the organizations whose leadership was necessary to reduce air pollution.

Conclusion-

The basic functions of Media is to inform, educate and entertain. Therefore, media's role is not only informing the people a particular issue but to educate them properly so that the people or the society got benefitted. When it is environmental issues, the media needs to inform people about the issue and also to educate them on that particular topic, so that the people become conscious of their various activities which will effect the nature.

The mass media could play a critical role in shaping the public debate on environmental issues in India. From the above discussion it is reflected that media can play an important role in not only responding but also in preventing or reducing the adverse impact of various environmental disasters like Delhi smog. While media were highly successful in spreading awareness on various government policies among the people imposed by the local Government of Delhi but the environmental coverage in the print and broadcast media can still be called limited in relation to the enormity of the nation's environmental problems. With the huge and proper reporting of the environmental issues will help to reduce its bad effect on the society. It is always advisable for all media to cover different stories of environment and it should be the duty of the journalist to not only inform them the issue but also educate them about the various solution of how they tackle these issues.

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