

## Role of mass media in creating environmental awareness

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### Abstract

This paper attempts to highlight the role that Media has played in setting perceptions and creating awareness on environmental issues. In the past decades, sustainability and environmental awareness have gained media attention. Due to increasing media coverage, our society is becoming more aware of the effects that our activities put on the health of the environment. In this regard the media has a big role to play in making people aware of environment issues. Most recent steps by the Government of India for promoting sanitation 'Swachhha Bharat Abhiyan' has got success by the united efforts of the Government and media. Media has always covered social and environmental issues thus it is the most revolutionary device for spreading consciousness towards environment protection.

**Keywords:** environment, media, awareness

### 1. Introduction

Environment is fundamental for all living things. Both developing and developed countries are facing serious environmental problems. While some of the problems might be alike due to their global nature (e.g. global warming, depletion of the ozone layer), others are specifically local ones. Unless the environment is protected, the existence of life on the planet Earth would eventually be impossible.

Environmental awareness may be defined as to help the social group and individual to gain a variety of experiences to acquire a basic understanding of environment and its associated problems. Environmental awareness needs a political answer. This is an emergency and emergency situations need emergency actions. Challenges on the environment are accelerating because an exploding human population and competing interest of economic development places greater demands on natural resources. Thus, the increase of demand accelerates the rate of environmental deterioration through depletion of resources, disruption of natural environments, and pollution. One of the most ominous problems facing countries is environmental crisis which threatens to precipitate and deepen the countries' precarious economic and social state. Everyone needs to understand that, among other things, this environmental crisis is a result of unwise use of natural resources and unplanned development projects, promoted by rapid population growth. As a result, many countries have, over the last few decades, experienced a serious degradation of natural resources and damage to the environment and human health. The growing awareness of the two-way relationship between environmental impact and socio-economic development, and the challenges posed by environmental problems has led to the insight that underlines the needs to strengthen the ways in which existing development programs address both the causes and effects of problems in each country.

The need to spread environmental awareness is enormous in the context of successfully addressing environmental problems. It is linked to environmental education. Provision

of environmental education creates greater awareness in individuals and communities with respect to putting environmental resources to use even while conserving them. On the other hand, greater environmental awareness increases the scope of environmental education—as a discipline as well as inclusion of aspects of it within the scope of other disciplines.

The concept of environmental awareness is explained as familiarity with an environmental subject with real understanding of its deeper cause and implications. This demonstrates that environmental awareness has a great effect on environmental stewardship attitudes and it has an effect on environmentally friendly behaviours. The main advantage of widespread environmental awareness is its contributions to public support for government action in environmental policy and management. The main tool for creating such awareness at macro level is by far, the media. The media used for the investigation of environmental awareness are news paper, radio and television programs which are widely and frequently used modern media.

John Dewey stated that education could not be limited within teacher and taught without social environment. So, mass media is one such potent force in the social environment of education. Through modern electronic techniques and technologies, mass media prove that education is, really comprehensive not confined within four walls of the classroom.

The role of mass media is one of the most important factors underlying the knowledge of environmental problems: this can only be true on the conditions that first, mass media are accessible to large proportions of the population, second, are spending some time on environmental issues and third, people are interested in information on ecological issues provided by the media so that they view or listen to the corresponding programs as well as read newspaper articles or other written publications dealing with environmental issues.

Really, mass media are the educational medium for the mass and mass education. Irrespective of caste, color, geographical,

sociological, economical diversities mass media prove as an important means for the education to all. Mankind gets a great deal of information from the widespread mass media i.e. newspaper, TV, radio, magazines, journals, films, etc. It is estimated that mass media may substitute the real classroom teaching in future.

Geographical knowledge and understanding is essential in helping people to comprehend and to respond appropriately to the news items from news papers, radio, television and internet around the world every day. It is often more pertinent for geographers to ask what has been reported, which place has been ignored and how would this news be represented differently by the media in a different locality.

Various media and means are used to spread environmental awareness among the people. It can serve this purpose by means of its multi-channel regional and network service comprising programs such as talks, interviews, plays and documentaries etc. The mass media considered here trying to explain environmental awareness are newspapers, radio and television due to the fact that these are the most widely and frequently used modern mass media in India. Radio is cheap, most easily accessible and radio signals cover almost the whole country. the role of radio in creating environmental awareness can not be considered an important one due to the fact that there are only very few regular environmental programs, although there is an instruction by Supreme Court for all media that programs on environment should be broadcast.

The electronic media can identify and bring to a halt forces affecting the natural and even the man- made environment. It matters much how the public mind can be mobilized to reduce pollution and promote environmental quality.

For instance, the prevention of wastage of oil, gas coal and other sources of energy is not the solitary goal. The goal should be to focus certain relative aspects leading to environmental protection through conservation emphasizing the protection of good earth. What we need is canvassing different methodologies of oil conservation since the electronic media are a potential mobilizer of public opinion. It is genuinely expected that the twin media play quite a significant role in influencing mass- awareness against the excessive use of energy.

The electronic media and the print media are the major mediums of spreading information about environment among the populace—educating them about environmental concerns and ways to address these. News, features, talk shows and discussions on television and radio are increasingly focusing on environmental themes of today. In this modern knowledge-society, media plays the role of facilitator of development, disseminator of information, and being an agent of change.

Print media, which is still dominant and most influential compared to electronic media can play a big role in environmental protection. Radio is cheap and easily accessible medium. Its signals cover almost the whole country.

There is a growing population of the young that are ardent users of new media (Social Media and Internet) platforms. With Facebook or Twitter, youths today are very much connected with each other and other global/local issues through the internet. Social media platforms are also utilized by industry and government agencies as a preferred tool of

communication with the general public.

The print, broadcast, and Internet media can be a powerful ally in educating the public on environmental matters. In order to perform this role effectively, it is often necessary for the Government to work with the media (and sometimes educate the media). This is often done informally, through regular briefings and information centres.

Media has a big role to play in making people aware of environment issues and taking actions to protect the environment. According to Tengbers (1995:132-148), over 2600 global media channels operate with the support of about 3000 satellites, reaching nearly 1.5 billion people across the globe. It can be argued that the majority of global citizens learn about environmental issues, beyond their immediate surroundings, through the global media.

Global warming, air and water pollution, overuse of fertilizers, the negative implication of use of plastics and polythene, conservation of energy and fuel resources, all these are topics of current media debate. Newspapers and magazines too are, one may say, more environment conscious than ever before. Articles and analyses explore the environmental debacle that our globe is headed towards and create awareness in the common man about environmental problems.

Compared to newspapers and radio-television does a good job in covering environmental issues: Discovery Channel, National Geographic Channel and Animal Planet Channel are broadcasting exclusively on endangered species, wild and sea life? The national channels are regulated by law to offer environmental programs. Doordashan the most important channel of dissemination that reaches all over the country has three regular programs on environment: each of the weekly broadcasts of scientifically profound “Earth Matters” focuses on one special environmental problem. Targeted at educated people “Earth Matters” offers information on the sources, explains the consequences of the problem considered and gives suggestions for solution by changing individual behavior. Weekly “Terraquiz”, India's first environmental quiz show on television.

Regarding the issue of environment awareness, media plays a vital role in spreading the true message. Along with bringing it into the hub of debates and discussions, it tries to suggest alternatives to people and policy-makers. First of all, the mere awareness also creates a genuine interest to probe into the exact matter. Thus, environment awareness is one of the important issues which media presents consciously and effectively to say a few things to the people. The awareness on environment has shown multiplicity of results in the form different issues of livelihood rights, of displacement and rehabilitation, of sustainability, of pollution led damages and its control etc. Thus, the all pervading media has really raised the awareness on environment among people.

## **2. Functions of Mass Media**

### **i) Providing various information**

These media help in disseminating various information for the mass. People acquire different knowledge very quickly

### **ii) Providing vocational information**

Media help in providing vocational and professional information to a larger group of the community.

### iii) Spreading awareness and civic responsibility

People can be aware of different problems of the society and their role in changing society through mass media. People know their rights and duties for the nation clearly.

### vi) Educational programmes

Mass Media help in forming suitable habit for different programmes and they utilize their leisure time in a productive way. It also influences the behavior of the people through different programmes.

### v) Role as a non-formal agency

Now in an advanced society mass media are not treated as informal agencies of education. They are called non-formal agencies due to its wide coverage of educational items in a systematic way. It is viewed that these media can substitute the classroom teaching in future.

Therefore, mass media are the main means of educating the society. These are the cheapest and quickest means of the education for the people. The impact and motivation is very quick through mass media. The teacher must use the educational media and methods effectively in the classroom.

## 3. Findings and Suggestion

A common weak point shared by radio, TV and newspaper in India is that there are no journalists specialized (only) on environmental issues and there is least possibility of further training in this field. Consequently, the frequency and quality of coverage on environment depends to a high degree on the personal interest and commitment of the journalists and editors. Further typical limitations of modern mass media in India are the language, the educational and the urban –rural biases that make it necessary to design special programs for all the different target groups if the aim is to reach a vast part of the population.

A general problem in using media for education is the lack of feedback and control of the audience or readership so that it is difficult to assess the impact of educational broadcasting. A support system that is needed for an educational message to deliver it to its target group can be offered only in few cases, the same is true for a deepening of information gained through the usage of media, e.g. via sharing experiences through discussions. Interestingly, only television and radio have an educational and motivational approach when dealing with environmental issues, while newspaper editors feel that their job is limited to providing their readership with information.

The focus of Indian media when covering environment is definitely on local and typical Indian problems like water and air pollution, deforestation and on the campaigns launched by Ministry of Environment and Forests (e.g. against the use of crackers at Deewali or the promotion of bags out of natural materials instead of plastic) as well as government politics while ecological problems at the global level are neglected to a great extent. It is amazing to see that people asked to brainstorm the environmental problems they have heard about mention exactly the issues covered in Indian media as it was revealed by the household survey conducted for this study. This fact gives strong evidence to the power of media in communicating environmental issues. People themselves seem to be convinced of the dominant role of media in creating environmental awareness anyway: More than half of

the interviewees (52%) declared that the information provided by media has been most important in making them aware of environmental problems.

The problem is that media professionals assigned to do programs or reports on the environment have several other responsibilities which demand their attention and time. It is not common for journalists to specialize in more than one area or topic. The capacities of journalists are not strong enough to produce and present programs using creative techniques. The role of the media to raise the community concerns and commitment for social and environmental issue is a very critical one. Awareness creation for the protection of the environment and the sustainable use of finite resources are matters that directly concern each citizen. The media can be an instrument in breaking the silence that surrounds the environmental problems and in creating an environment that encourages discussions of how the community can participate and change their behaviour. However, the level of involvement of the media in the country to address environmental challenges is only event based. Environmental issues have not yet reached a stage where they are the media's prime agenda. The media fails to take a creative approach in producing stories about environmental protection and gives insufficient attention to environmental degradation and its consequences. The media does not seem to be in a position to create environmental awareness to the public in a given geographical area.

Furthermore, the media does not give fair and optimal space and time to environmental issues. No detailed studies to ascertain the role of the media in environmental awareness issues have been done unlike other development and political issues. Even though some activities undertaken so far are positive, the work done to date in the study area is very inadequate compared to the consequences of environmental challenges. The discipline of geography provides the ideal basis for media and environmental awareness research due to the spatial attributes of various phenomena on the earth's surface through time.

## 4. Conclusion

Awareness creation activities carried out by the media and the various anti-environmental degradation clubs and organizations that deal with environmental protection have been unsuccessful. It is noted that both urban and rural people were not well informed about the mode of destruction and protection of the environment. One of the causes of the deep rooted environmental problems in a country is lack of awareness which is at the very heart of the inappropriate management and utilization of environmental resources. Thus, raising the awareness of a society through media is one of the strategies required for the effective realization of environmental objectives and goals. It is truly crucial to raise public awareness of environmental issues. Media's efforts to sensitize the public about environment issues and its continuing central role in the struggle against the cause of environmental problems are indispensable.

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