

Media Influence on Environmental Perception and Sustainability Discourse: A Review

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INTRODUCTION

With the ongoing climate change and a dramatic decrease in biodiversity, the environment needs a journalist's attention more than ever. They have the invariably critical power to spread awareness, foster collective action, and promote the growth of sustainable development and biodiversity conservation. The United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972 was the first world conference to put the environment high on the agenda, and one of the key outcomes of the conference was the establishment of the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), the mandate of which is to facilitate sustainable development. The UNEP also emphasized the importance of education and the media multiple times in raising awareness about the environment and sustainability. The media is a powerful vehicle for educating the public, setting perceptions, and organizing action on environmental matters. Through conventional news media, documentaries, or the increasing power of social media sites, the reach and influence of the media have been proven to be irreplaceable in broadening awareness and accelerating environmental activism. Media coverage impacts attitudes in a favorable direction toward the environment and environmental policy (Kumar, et al, 2023). This review study explores both global and Indian perspectives on the media's role in fostering environmental consciousness, highlighting the opportunities, challenges, and ethical considerations that shape the media's influence on sustainability and biodiversity conservation. Global Perspectives on Media and Environmental Awareness There are different perceptions in understanding the public participation in matters related environment and sustainability. For example, Kanapathy et al. (2019) talk about transforming an individual's perception and attitude toward sustainable development, which is feasible only through education. A study on randomly selected 480 students from Spanish public and private universities confirms a positive relationship between the attitude and sustainable behaviour of university students (Torroba, Macarena Diaz et al., 2023). On the other hand, Wirdianti et al. (2019) stressed the positive relationship between environmental intelligence and pro- environmental behaviour, stating that personality traits and environmental intelligence directly influence environmental behaviour. However, addressing environmental degradation requires educating the public in the role of media, whether print, electronic media, the internet, or social media, is undeniably crucial. The role played by mass media in the social construction of environmental problems is sometimes called environmental education (Hannigan, 1995). The media, along with other ecological preservation organizations and institutions, are entrusted with the responsibility of producing and disseminating content that facilitates the public to respond and act for environmental safety. Across the world, the media have long been acknowledged as a central driver of public knowledge and participation in environmental matters. According to Moser & Dilling (2019), the media play a crucial role not only in terms of creating awareness but also in setting the terms of environment-related issues such as climate change and conserving biodiversity. Their research highlights that environmental challenge framing methods in the media can galvanize public concern or lead to apathy based on how environmental challenges are framed. Likewise, Gorman et al. (2020) undertook a longitudinal study showing how media, especially visual media such as documentaries and digital media, can significantly influence public awareness, particularly among young people. Such a demographic, they contend, will be more inclined to read environmental materials on sites such as Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter, and therefore digital media has become a pivotal force in

worldwide environmental campaigns. At the global level, the media have always been identified as a key force shaping public knowledge and participation with regard to environmental issues. As highlighted by Moser & Dilling (2019), the media plays a critical role not only in generating awareness but also in framing environmental stories that account for public knowledge of issues such as climate change and conserving biodiversity. Their research highlights that framing methods in the media may either mobilize public attention or lead to apathy based on the way environmental issues are framed. Likewise, Gorman et al. (2020) had an investigation based on longitudinal approach that showed how media, especially visual media such as documentaries and digital media, can profoundly influence public awareness, particularly among younger groups. Such a demographic, they claim, is more inclined to be drawn towards environmental content on social media platforms like Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram, which has turned the world of digital media into a key driver of global environmental movements. The role of documentaries in environmental communication has also been studied in depth. Koponen and van der Heijden (2021) argue that documentaries serve as powerful emotional tools that can evoke public empathy and mobilize support for conservation efforts. However, they also caution that the framing of environmental crises in terms of catastrophe without presenting solutions can result in public disengagement. Sierra et al. (2022) emphasize the need for balanced narratives in documentaries, which both highlight challenges and provide actionable solutions. The researchers (Maihanyar et al., 2024) examined the role of television in promoting and fostering a culture of maintaining a clean and healthy living environment. A survey on 1000 samples in three northern provinces of Afghanistan indicates that television channels are the most effective, followed by social networks, radio, and printed publications in creating a culture of responsibility among the public towards the environment. The research findings also indicate that environmental preservation is a concern at international, national, local, and even individual levels. Issues such as waste management, water resource pollution, consumption of stored water, clean air, and a healthy living environment are significant from the individual to the global level. However, the satisfaction level of respondents is not high regarding the programming of domestic channels and their focus on environmental issues. Jain and Ashok (2024) interestingly analysed the narrative tactics and storytelling techniques employed by journalists, assessed the effectiveness of different media platforms, including print, internet, and broadcast in reaching and engaging audiences on environmental issues, and explored the challenges journalists face in covering these topics. The researchers offered significant insights to various stakeholders. The findings identified that the technique and storytelling involved in both platforms are quite different. The traditional media, by its investigative reports, has shown outstanding skills that attract individuals who are in need of in-depth and detailed information. By incorporating multimedia elements like movies, infographics, and One of the main outcomes of the first global summit to prioritise environmental issues was the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), whose mission is to sustainable growth. Additionally, the UNEP often emphasised the critical role that media and education play in advancing sustainability and environmental consciousness. To raise public awareness, environmental communication must be done effectively. Using the media to disseminate messages and sway public opinion around sustainability and environmental issues is one method of environmental communication. Numerous studies have highlighted how important the media is in encouraging public interest in topics pertaining to sustainable development. Leiserowitz et al. (2018) point to the political affiliations that shape the attitudes of most Americans regarding climate change. For example, opinion polls by the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication (YPCCC) reveal that 49% of conservative Republicans think that climate change is happening, while 92% of liberal Democrats believe so (Leiserowitz et al., 2018). The study again confirms that the political belief and media framing affect the views of the American people regarding Climate change. According to studies, government initiatives, scientific debates, and the media all influence how the general public views climate change over time. According to surveys conducted by the UK Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS), for example, public anxiety over climate change peaked in the late 2000s following significant climate catastrophes such as heat waves and floods. However, in the years that followed, this worry decreased as a result of factors like the economic crisis,

political disputes, and some media outlets casting doubt on climate change (Capstick et al., 2015). This demonstrates how media messages, political debates, and economic circumstances all have a significant impact on public opinion in order to disseminate and shape ideas regarding sustainability and environmental challenges. encouraging public involvement in topics pertaining to sustainable development. According to O'Brien, Leichenko, Kelkar, Venema, Aandahl, Tompkins & West (2019), public awareness of climate change in African countries has increased in recent years, driven by growing scientific evidence, media coverage, and community-based initiatives. A study by Shintasiwi and Wasino (2019) found that media, especially digital platforms, significantly influence public awareness and behavior regarding environmental issues. For instance, university students reported that digital media platforms, such as social media and blogs, have a greater impact on raising awareness about sustainable development compared to traditional media. These platforms present sustainability topics in innovative and engaging ways, leading to increased understanding and behavioral changes. And among Indonesian adolescents aged 11 to 23, who primarily rely on social media for information, there is already a strong awareness of environmental sustainability—an awareness largely influenced by news content and public service advertisements (Imam & Dian, 2020). Olayinka, et al. 2024 analyzed photos, videos, infographics, and text on various websites and efforts of social media to understand the people's views on climate change. They also analysed written materials about climate change, including articles, editorials, and advertising. They found that new media platforms, such as social media, online news sites, and blogs, significantly influence Nigerians' perceptions of climate change. They also express concern about the spread of misinformation and disinformation on social media platforms that might create confusion about climate change-related issues. Calista and Siswantini (2023) surveyed 400 Gen-Z between the ages of 15 and 23 in Indonesia. In social media, Gen-Z has become one of the most vocal generations. They found that Gen-Z primarily used Instagram as their primary social media platform, followed by WhatsApp, TikTok, Twitter, YouTube, Telegram, and Facebook. The researchers reported that the majority of the respondents spend 4 to 6 hours per day on social media. The results indicate that social media influences Indonesian Gen-Z about the impacts and risks of climate change. Various studies have reported a strong connection between public perceptions and the information shared on media platforms. The content, specific media, especially social media, and storytelling formats also influence how people understand and respond to environmental issues. Environmental Journalism, Social Media, and Ethics The rise of social media has transformed the landscape of environmental activism. In Pillai's (2020)'s study, social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook were shown to serve as powerful tools for grassroots environmental campaigns, such as #SaveTheWesternGhats. These platforms allow activists to bypass traditional media gatekeepers, reaching a wider audience and mobilizing support for urgent conservation causes. The key advantage of digital activism is its capacity to reach a global audience, fostering a borderless community. The European Union used social media to create environmental awareness under "the For Good Environment campaign", launched in March 2024. This campaign aimed to educate and engage the public on key environmental challenges, emphasising the connection between sustainability, climate change, and everyday behaviours. Numerous activities were carried out as part of this project, such as media campaigns, community involvement events, and educational programs (<https://www.europehouse-kosovo.com>). encouraging public involvement in topics about sustainable development. The term eco-celebrity refers to individuals who use their public prominence to promote environmental issues, playing a key role in shaping public attitudes and actions. One of the examples is the existence and presence of Greta Thunberg, a Swedish climate activist, on Twitter and Instagram. Greta Thunberg inspired an estimated 1.6 million students from 120 countries to join the movement, including Indonesia. This widespread impact became known as the "Greta effect," reflecting the impact of eco celebrity and social media influence on the younger generation and communities to address challenges of environmental sustainability (Robertua,2024). Indonesian youth activists have also drawn inspiration from Thunberg's work. For instance, Salsabila Kairunissa, a climate activist in Jakarta, initiated the "School Strike for the Forest" campaign, highlighting the importance of forest conservation. Based on research by the Pew Research Center, Gen-Z (Generation Z) has appeared as the group that is most engaged and vocal about issues on social media,

one of which is climate change (Tyson, 2021). Rao (2022) discusses the growing influence of digital platforms, particularly in India, where social media enables youth engagement with environmental activism and provides a voice to marginalized communities fighting for environmental justice. However, Patel & Chauhan (2023) caution that the democratization of information on social media can also lead to the spread of misinformation. Environmental claims can easily be exaggerated or distorted, leading to public confusion and hindering effective policy implementation. As such, Rao (2022) advocates for media literacy programs that help users discern credible information and engage with environmental content critically. Srivarnesh and Arul (2024) analysed news stories from the news channels NDTV 24x7, India Today, and WION using Frame Analysis Theory. Various framing techniques are employed by the media to shape narratives around climate change, influencing public understanding and attitudes. The researcher has analysed the frames adopted by three news channels, WION, India Today, and NDTV 24x7. They observed that the dominant environmental frames used in the three news channels were the human-interest frame, the attribution of responsibility frame, the economic consequences frame, and the conflict frame. The researchers also stated that television journalists experience time constraints in reporting environmental issues, where only 2-3 minutes are allotted for a story. In-depth interviews with journalists reveal that one of the most significant challenges in covering environmental issues is obtaining accurate information, as relevant records are often held exclusively by government authorities. The researchers suggest that News channels should employ environmental journalists to investigate and analyze environmental issues, simplifying complex scientific information and making it accessible and relevant to local audiences with an emphasis on community vulnerability. An analysis of 25 global environmental stories clearly demonstrates that more alternative news platforms were adopted for a constructive approach to reporting news (Priya and Arul, 2023).. The prominent themes that emerged were exemplary practices (48%), civic engagement (44%), sustainability (40%), climate change (32%), conservation (32%), lifestyle changes (32%), community empowerment (12%), and activism (8%). The researchers noted that a majority of stories (56%) included statements, opinions, and inferences from experts and stakeholders (scientists, policymakers, and community members) that added value and credibility to the issues covered. There has also been much discussion on the ethical aspects of environmental journalism. As noted by Hansen & Akerlof (2021) and Takahashi et al. (2021), journalists frequently struggle to strike a balance between the demands of political interests and corporate pressures and the requirement for objective, truthful environmental reporting. Important environmental topics like pollution, deforestation, or endangered species may receive diluted or even false coverage as a result of this tension. In order to ensure thorough and responsible reporting, Anderson & Tollefson (2010) contend that environmental journalists must place a high priority on accuracy, transparency, and the inclusion of varied viewpoints. Journalists frequently cover environmental news wrongly because they lack the necessary educational expertise in environmental concerns or science.. As journalists lack expertise, they avoid probing deeply and struggle to evaluate the information received from stakeholders. Friedman (1991) noted that some journalists couldn't interpret environmental pollution data and heavily depended on sources. Advertiser pressure, management policy, unavailability of information, provincialism, reluctance to trust conservationist sources, and space, time, and finances all create special challenges for environmental journalists. The International organizations, line UN and UNESCO, along with Brazil, expressed concerns about environmental disinformation through social media, apps, and AI. The United Nations launched a Global Initiative for Information Integrity on Climate Change during the G20 Leaders' Summit in Brazil. They fund projects to carry in-depth research to expose climate disinformation and strengthen communication campaigns to mitigate disinformation and empower people (<https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/information-integrity>, 2025).

Indian Media and Biodiversity Conservation

In India, the role of media in promoting biodiversity conservation has gained attention, but challenges remain in effectively integrating environmental issues into mainstream reporting. Reddy & Rao (2014) examined how Indian newspapers often underreport environmental issues, with coverage limited to occasional reports of major environmental disasters. As a result, environmental stories tend to be overshadowed by more politically charged or economically focused news. Ghosh & Sen (2018) also found

that Indian wildlife documentaries frequently focus on charismatic megafauna, such as tigers and elephants, while lesser-known species and ecosystems remain largely neglected. Despite these challenges, Indian media has also shown promise in raising awareness about the need for conservation. Bhattacharya (2016) discusses how independent filmmakers and regional media outlets are increasingly taking on the task of highlighting environmental issues in a more nuanced way. Programs like Wild India and independent documentaries focused on smaller, less charismatic species are helping to broaden the scope of biodiversity coverage in India. The researcher (Kakade et al, 2013) has selected 135 samples in Karnataka State Women's University, Bijapur, in order to know the role of media in creating awareness about climate change. A large percentage of respondents (60percent) say that the media content regarding the climate change is relevant and (86.67percent) of the respondents says that they get complete information regarding climate change through media and (77.78 percent) utilize media content in their life and amongst them (63.81percent) use that for some extent. Thus, in Bijapur, Television is the most popular medium among people to know about climate change, followed by Newspaper, Radio, and the Internet, respectively. Further, Kumar (2019) studied the role of media in promoting ecotourism in India's protected areas, noting that while ecotourism is portrayed as a solution to biodiversity conservation, media coverage often simplifies the complexities of balancing conservation with tourism development. Media's portrayal of iconic parks like Kaziranga and Jim Corbett has increased awareness of conservation issues but has also led to an overemphasis on tourist appeal rather than local community engagement in conservation efforts. The analysis of Indian media reflects that media not only cover scientific research on the negative impacts of climate change but also highlight, in equal measure, scientific advancements to help better understand climate change, and ways to mitigate and adapt.(Tobias, et al. 2019). Scientists and scientific organizations are key sources to cover local environmental and climate change challenges, such as pollution, infrastructure issues, such as transportation and green buildings. Further, Indian media provide valuable information for the Indian public to understand and contextualize the complex issues. The Indian media plays a significant role in raising awareness through various platforms about environmental issues by highlighting local and national challenges, solutions, and policy debates. It promotes community involvement through campaigns. Nevertheless, constraints like journalists' lack of scientific training, business interests, and uneven coverage can make environmental reporting less thorough and accurate. Ecotourism and the Media's Role in Sustainable Development. The media's role in propagating eco tourism as a sustainable development component has attracted considerable notice. Sharma & Raj (2015) pointed out how ecotourism, in areas such as Kerala and the Andaman Islands, has been encouraged through media campaigns stressing the need to protect natural scenery while providing for sustainable economic growth. These campaigns inform tourists as well as the local population of the advantages of ecotourism for the environment and have helped foster more eco-friendly tourism practices that maintain biodiversity. Raghavan (2020) further analyzed how media coverage of ecotourism, when done responsibly, can foster local community involvement in conservation. In national parks such as Gir and Sundarbans, the media have played a crucial role in promoting the idea that tourism revenues can be reinvested into conservation efforts, creating a win-win situation for both wildlife and local communities. However, Verma & Singh (2019) warn that unchecked tourism can have adverse effects, particularly when the media fails to emphasize the importance of responsible visitor behaviour and conservation-centric policies.

Challenges in Environmental Reporting in India

Even in the face of increased awareness of environmental concerns in India, Desai (2017) and Jain & Kaur (2016) identify various challenges environmental reporters in India have to contend with. Scarce resources, absence of specialized education, and political interference all lead to inadequate coverage of environmental issues. In addition, Menon & Nair(2023) contend that the intricacies of conservation efforts, particularly in areas of high speed development, tend to be over simplified or overlooked by media outlets, thereby denying the public a complete appreciation of the issues at stake Another noteworthy discovery is that media companies display news and special stories according to their editorial stance, which might exacerbate public polarization over policies like climate change.

Confusion and scepticism may result from this disparity in coverage, particularly when people come across conflicting accounts. Khanya (2024) emphasizes the importance of consistent and science-based media narratives for a clear and accurate understanding of public. The balanced viewpoint can help mitigate misinformation and foster a more informed and united public response. It is crucial to develop guidelines for journalists for media coverage on environmental issues, policy-related news or climate change. Policymakers should develop regulations and ensure that they are implemented to provide accurate, balanced, and scientifically informed reporting. Rashmi, et al. (2024) in their research through secondary data analysis and FGDs found that environmental journalism should receive more attention and be given dedicated sections in newspapers or social media portals, reporting should be more targeted, and public policies should be highlighted. By examining the responses, it is possible to determine that, when compared to print and electronic media, digital media is thought to be more effective in dealing with issues and raising public awareness in real-time

CONCLUSION

The role of media in promoting sustainable development and biodiversity conservation is undeniable. As both a source of information and a catalyst for public action, the media shapes how environmental issues are perceived and addressed. Global and Indian studies highlight the opportunities and challenges that media face in this domain, from the ethical considerations of environmental journalism to the power of social media in fostering grassroots movements. According to Graf-Vlachy et al the study of media coverage of firms has grown in recent years, but the literature is scattered across disciplines, making it challenging to grasp its contributions and identify research gaps (Graf-Vlachy et al). While there is significant potential for media to drive positive change, there remains a need for more responsible, in-depth reporting that engages with the complexities of environmental conservation and empowers audiences to take meaningful action.

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