Newspaper Framing of Climate Change and Sustainability Issues in India

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ABSTRACT

This article describes how climate change influences nature and human life and it is the basis for social and economic development. News reporting on climate change must address the challenges in the deeper social and economic dimensions of sustainable development. The news coverage of climate change and sustainability issues helps people to better understand the concepts and perspectives of environment. This article aims to examine how dominant newspapers in Tamil Nadu have framed climate change and sustainability issues. This is done by analyzing climate change articles (N = 120) in two mainstream newspapers – The Hindu in English and the Daily Thanthi in Tamil. Climate change communication in regional newspapers and local news stories may increase the public's interest and knowledge level regarding climate change and sustainability issues.

KEYWORDS

Climate Change, Daily Thanthi, Newspapers, Sustainability, The Hindu

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development is a goal for the present and future generations to achieve equal rights and opportunities that help lead a good human life (Brundtland, 1987). It is also a goal to raise the standard of living of the poor. The socio-economic-environmental dimensions must be in balance to attain sustainable development. Sustainability is understood as continued growth; and establishing sustainability in policy circles is the outcome of enormous communicative effort by key decision making and policy planning fora such as the World Summit on Sustainable Development and the Conference of Parties (COPs) on climate change (Miller & Dinan, 2015). Sustainable development is the idea of progress, and progress is one of the most powerful notions in the modern world. Sustainable development involves economic growth, environmental conservation, social justice and not just for the moment, but in permanence (Dryzek, 2005).

Climate change and sustainable development are interrelated. Climate change influences nature and human life and it is the basis for social and economic development (IPCC, 2007). Climate change is included as one of the goals in the new agenda for sustainable development to 'take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts' (Sustainable Development Goals, 2015). It is a serious global environmental issue and it affects millions of people worldwide. According to the fifth assessment report by the IPCC (2014), "Continued emission of greenhouse gases will cause further warming and long-lasting changes in all components of the climate system, increasing the likelihood of severe, pervasive and irreversible impacts on people and ecosystems." Rise in temperature, changing precipitation patterns, rising sea-level and melting glaciers are some of the consequences of climate change. In developing countries, poor and marginalized groups are worst affected by the

impacts of climate change such as drought, floods, extreme weather events, shortage of food and drinking water. India is one of the countries in Asia most susceptible to climate change. Combating climate change to achieve sustainable development is a challenge for society. News reporting on climate change must address the challenges posed in the deeper social and economic dimensions of sustainable development. Reporting needs a multi-faceted approach, in making people understand the complexity of climate change. Although facts, figures, and rational analysis are necessary, they are insufficient in persuading individuals and communities to adopt more climate friendly lifestyles, practices and use of technologies. Senior journalist G. Krishnan (2009) said, "reporters are often reluctant to admit that they do not understand the subject; instead, they merely reproduce the contents of the press releases or briefings."

Media coverage of climate change and sustainability issues help the reader better understand the concepts and perspectives of environment. The U.N. COP21 on climate change held in December 2015 in Paris, France, had wide media coverage – be it on newspaper, radio, television or the internet. Newspapers have played an important role in disseminating climate change and sustainability issues discussed in the conference. The terms such as 'climate change', 'global warming' and 'El Nino' are gaining popularity among the public. This study aims to analyze the framing of climate change and sustainability issues in dominant newspapers in Tamil Nadu. The objectives of the study are:

- To examine how climate change and sustainability issues are represented in *The Hindu* and the *Daily Thanthi* newspapers
- To identify most/least prominent frames in these two newspapers
- To find out the differences in the coverage of issues between these two newspapers
- To analyze the ways the issues are represented visually.

NEWSPAPER FRAMING STUDIES

This study analyzed the newspaper coverage of climate change and sustainability issues from the theoretical perspective of framing. Framing is regarded as a prominent area of research in analyzing the news production. As mentioned by Entman (1993), framing involves selection and salience i.e. to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition. Most of the researchers used framing in diverse ways.

Chetty et al. (2015) investigated the framing of climate change science in New Zealand newspapers using content analysis and found that the Politics, Social Progress, and Economic frames were most prominent in coverage. More emphasis on the Politics frame was in the coverage of actions and comments of world leaders in relation to talks and negotiations at various international policy events. Politicians and world leaders were primary actors accountable for the issues and to solve the problem. A study by Dirikx and Gelders (2009) examined climate change issues in French and Dutch newspapers. The Consequences frame was found to be most prominent followed by the Responsibility frame. Many articles mention the need for urgent actions, refer to possible solutions and suggest that governments are responsible for and/or capable of alleviating problems. A study by Boykoff and Boykoff (2007) examined climate science communication in the print and television media in the US from 1988 to 2004 and found that the news media play a key role in shaping the climate change information and the increase in coverage was attributed to politics than nature science and climate talks. Calderón et al. (2015) in Spanish-speaking online media during COP16 (Cancun-2010) and COP17 (Durban-2011) found that the principal sources were politicians and it discussed that there exists a 'nationalistic domestication' and that media coverage does not respond to local needs. According to Pompper (2004), the mainstream newspapers used frames that relied heavily on government and industrial sources where voices of the common people were suppressed. A study by Kosteralla et al. (2013) found that there is reduced reliability in the Greek media with regard to the quality of environmental information.

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