

An Exploratory Study of News Coverage of Water Issues in Rajasthan's Newspapers

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Abstract

This research seeks to explore the news coverage of environmental problems with special reference to water issues. In recent times, we are experiencing high temperatures in climate, pollution, deforestation, water scarcity, land degradation, rampant air pollution etc. are some of the major issues which are posing a threat to mankind. Major environmental problems are due to human interventions and insensitive behaviour towards nature. So, here the media plays a pivotal role in influencing the people and to make them understand the complexity of the environmental problems and sensitize them to adopt eco-friendly practices. As the state Rajasthan is highly variable and scanty & therefore water is a decisive factor for development planning in Rajasthan. In order to carry out the objectives, four newspapers of Rajasthan are selected in which two newspapers are top dailies of Rajasthan i.e. Danik Bhaskar & Rajasthan Patrika and other two are selected on the basis of geographical viewership i.e. Dainik Navjyoti and Rashtradoot. The content analysis method is used & tries to find out the extent of coverage and level of prominence given to the environmental problems with special reference to water issues especially when there is no major disaster.

Keywords: Environmental Problems; News Coverage; Print Media; Rajasthan; Water issues.

Environment is becoming a major concern for everyone these days. Over the last few decades, our earth is facing a lot of environmental issues. Our actions are not in favour of protection of the environment. It has shown adverse effects in many ways which lead to environment degradation due to regular human interventions. There are various environmental issues which need our attention and addressed effectively. The greatest challenge today is global climate change and poses a serious threat to our

ecology, society and economy. Therefore, the role of mass media was always significant in making people aware about their surroundings and sensitizing them towards nature. Environment issues are a burning topic in the present day times which needs to be addressed and make our citizens aware about them so that they can act responsibly. Rajasthan is the largest state in India with two-third of its area as Thar desert. The entire state receives scanty rainfall and falls within areas of greatest climate sensitivity, maximum vulnerability and lowest adaptive capacity. The water resources in the State are scarce and have a highly uneven distribution both temporally and spatially. As the observation shows that changes being experienced in the climate of Rajasthan are over the natural climate variability prevailing in the region.

The State also has the highest probability of drought occurrence in the country (RAPCC,2012). Some of the various environmental issues in Rajasthan like water scarcity, droughts, deforestation, floods, less rainfall etc. which need our attention in terms of bringing awareness to people through in-depth editorials, columns and debates which is possible by dissemination of information about the real situation of environment degradation. The change in climate caused by human activities have a huge impact on the economic, social and physical status of states like Rajasthan. Extensive deforestation caused by huge demand for wood have caused serious stress on the ecosystem. It has affected valleys around the Aravalli hills. The massive deforestation and the degradation of soil of the hill slopes have caused climatic changes. It has altered the micro rainfall patterns. The duration of the rainy season has reduced and increased pressure on the population. It has also stressed livestock related enterprises due to scarcity of water sources in the state.

The environmental resources caused the drinking water crisis in parts of Rajasthan (Narpat & Narendra, 2013). According to the author the environmental issues need to be addressed on serious note and required extensive efforts of all human beings. Therefore, as suggested by the study the role of print media which is still dominant and influential media and does have an impact on a large number of people. It plays a major role in transforming and educating the society about environment protection. Print media is one of the most popular and efficient forms of mass communication. It plays a significant role in influencing and shaping the people's perception. It has the benefit of making strong impact and influence on the minds of the public with its extensive coverage and analysis (Patil, 2011).

Literature Review

In 2010, V. Ratna Reddy conducted a study to analyze the water sector under such conditions in Rajasthan. The study was based on following parameters like economical, financial, physical and equity performance across sub-sectors. It concluded that hardly any sub-sector showed any satisfactory performance. Also, it was noted that there is an urban and rich bias culture in access to water and its public distribution. As the performance of the urban drinking water sector was relatively better but and to bring it to the satisfactory level of financial and economic performance it requires a lot more effort. The author suggested some short-terms to meet the immediate demands which are critical for sustainable water resource management for scarcity conditions.

In 2012, Arul Aram explored in a study that there are major issues and concerns regarding environment that need to be addressed in environmental studies in colleges. As the study examines some concerns like "how environmentally conscious are media educators in India" and concluded that in present era, mostly all courses in universities have general paper on environmental studies but hardly media studies at post graduate level has any such a subject. As environment literacy is a highly pertinent for journalism students so as to make them learn how to report the environment issues. The researcher concluded that the main problems developing countries face are related to coverage of climate change and its related issues like lack of training, difficult access of information of environment related subjects. Due to which the Indian media is more depended on news agencies especially for climate change rather than local generated news.

In 2013 in a study conducted by Bharvi Dutt & et.al. conducts a study to examine the content of environmental related issues published in 31 prominent English language dailies of Indian newspapers. It studied the content through thematic representation and quantification of data. The study concluded that the topics discussed under environment the most prominence was given to climate change and global warming. Among all the selected daily newspapers the maximum space devoted to the environment issues was given by The Times of India.

In 2015, Ram Babu and Ajay examined in their study that there is climate variability in western drylands of Rajasthan over the last 35 years. Due to which it has a direct impact on the water resources. The scanty rainfall and the scarcity of water resources due to variability resulting in high frequency occurrence of droughts and severe water stress conditions. It

also suggests that Indira Gandhi canal made a great contribution in helping the region to tackle the high variability in rainfall. It can aid in water security through expansion of canal networks.

In 2016, Anurada Meda conducted a study which concluded that the main focus was given to issues related to global warming and climate change. The next prioritized news items were on pollution, seasonal news and very few awareness creating articles and motivating articles on protecting the environment and planet earth. As compared to Times of India, The Hindu has been balanced in its covering environmental news. But moreover, the researcher suggests that there is a need to increase the amount of space allotted and extensive coverage, features and editorials should be prioritised by the both newspapers.

In 2018 T. Nirmala and Arul suggested through their study that newspapers like Times of India used more textual graphical information in their coverage whereas The Hindu used more statistical based data in its stories. Though both the newspapers use expert infographic artists and graphic designers. On the other hand, mostly climate change stories covered international politics but lacked local view in both the newspapers. The study suggests that coverage in newspapers should give more emphasis to scientifically sound articles with ethical points of view.

In Jan 2020, Sarah published an article in The Wire, titled 'In India's west what explains groundwater shortage after years of more rain' explained that western India received more rainfall but groundwater storage was improved in Gujarat but not in Rajasthan. A team of IIT researchers examined and have found that Rajasthan's situation is not improved due to unrestricted access to groundwater subsidies and unregulated use of water used in irrigation caused huge variability in groundwater level of shallow wells resulting in Rajasthan is facing a severe water crisis.

Objectives

To analyze the content and nature of the stories reported on environmental problems with special reference to water issues in the selected newspapers.

To explore the level of prominence given to environmental problems with special reference to water in the newspapers of Rajasthan.

To trace out the total coverage of environmental problems given in the newspapers of Rajasthan.

Significance of the Study

The study attempts to analyse the role of newspapers in covering environmental problems with special reference to water issues in Rajasthan. The study will find out the number of stories published and importance given by this medium during the time under study. It will further help to formulate how much coverage is given to the environmental problems in print media without any huge disaster.

Research Method

Keeping the above literature in mind, it was felt to assess the role played by the four hindi dailies of Rajasthan in bringing environmental problems with special reference to water issues to the public's platter through content analysis method. The study will explore and quantify the coverage and prominence given in selected four hindi newspapers of Rajasthan.

Methodology

The methodology used in this study is to examine the print media coverage of certain newspapers of environmental problems as primary and secondary data. The time period is of one month i.e. July, 2020 taken for the study. The reason behind taking this time period is that this month the monsoon begins in major parts of Rajasthan and so to assess how much coverage is related to the environment with special reference to water issues given in the monsoon period. The study is based on four hindi dailies of Rajasthan from 1st July 2020 to 31st July 2020. The four newspapers are selected are the most circulated dailies in Rajasthan. The items from the dailies were analysed which includes total coverage in terms of columns, editorials, photographs, placement of the news stories etc and are classified as specific units like just reporting, follow ups, solution based, law & policy etc.

Newspapers of Rajasthan

The newspapers of Rajasthan have reached too far flung areas and to remote regions of the state. It has many local newspapers which are informative and tackle various kinds of articles based on social issues, cultures, arts, political etc and cater the needs of rural people. The Hindi Newspaper of Rajasthan is the most famous and dominant among people in Rajasthan followed by English Newspaper. According to ABC circulation, Rajasthan Patrika and Danik Bhaskar together are among the top news-

papers in Rajasthan. After these top two, the other oldest and popular newspapers of Rajasthan, Dainik Navjyoti and Rastradhoot which are also a Hindi language daily newspaper of Rajasthan, published from Jaipur, Kota, Ajmer etc and provides information of the whole Rajasthan in a district wise order.

Results and Data Interpretation

I. Total Coverage

Table (1.1) Total coverage of environment problems in the following newspapers:

S.no	Newspaper	No. of items published (Environment)	Percentage (%)
1.	Danik Bhaskar	12	6.6%
2.	Rajasthan Patrika	39	21.5%
3.	Danik Navjyoti	59	32.5%
4.	Rastradhoot	75	41.4%
Total		181	100%

Table (1.2) Total coverage of water issues in the following newspapers:

S.no	Newspapers	No. of items published (Water Issues)	Percentage (%)
1	Danik Bhaskar	12	7.4%
2	Rajasthan Patrika	49	30.2%
3	Danik Navjyoti	52	32%
4	Rastradhoot	51	31.4%
Total		162	100%

From the above findings of the study, the tables (1.1) and (1.2) showed that the maximum number of articles published on environment and water issues in Rastradhoot and Danik Navjyoti. Being the top dailies of Rajasthan, the number of items published in Rajasthan Patrika and Danik Bhaskar was comparatively low. The given data includes editorials, photographs, environment related columns and water based issues. The figures showed that in the following newspapers Danik Bhaskar has the

lowest total coverage as compared to rest of the newspapers. The maximum number of stories on environment were related to plantation during monsoon. The water based stories mostly related water logging, floods, state water projects, water supply etc.

II. Placement of articles

In table (2.1) the environmental problems in the following newspapers of Rajasthan in July 2020:

Newspapers	Front Page	Left Page	Right Page	Total
Danik Bhaskar	–	10 (58%)	07 (41%)	17 (100%)
Rajasthan Patrika	–	12 (32%)	25 (67%)	37 (100%)
Danik Navjyoti	–	31 (53%)	28 (47%)	59 (100%)
Rastrdhoot	08 (8%)	46 (51%)	35 (39%)	89 (100%)

In table (2.2) the water based issues of following newspapers of Rajasthan in July 2020:

Newspapers	Front Page	Left Page	Right Page	Total
Danik Bhaskar	01 (7%)	07 (46%)	07 (46%)	15 (100%)
Rajasthan Patrika	03 (6%)	29 (55%)	21 (40%)	53 (100%)
Danik Navjyoti	03 (7%)	23 (50%)	20 (43%)	46 (100%)
Rastrdhoot	–	25 (45%)	30 (54%)	55 (100%)

The above tables (2.1) and (2.2) shows that there were very less stories reported on front page of the following selected newspapers of Rajasthan. Mostly stories on environmental and water based issues were reported on left side of the newspapers.

Rajasthan Patrika and Danik Bhaskar are the top two dailies of Rajasthan and still the coverage of environment Problems and water issues given less coverage on front page of the newspapers.

III. Level of prominence

Table (3.1) Nature of the story reported of environment problems in four newspapers of Rajasthan in July 2020:

Newspaper	Just reporting	Solution based	Follow ups	Law & Policy	Total
Danik Bhaskar	13 (87%)	02 (13%)	–	–	15
Rajasthan patrika	24 (77%)	07 (22%)	–	–	31
Danik Navjyoti	46 (77%)	12 (20%)	02 (3%)	–	60
Rastradhoot	51 (63%)	25 (31%)	04 (5%)	04 (5%)	80

Table (3.2) Nature of the story reported of water issues in four newspapers of Rajasthan in July 2020:

Newspaper	Just reporting	Solution based	Follow ups	Law & Policy	Total
Danik Bhaskar	12 (80%)	02 (13%)	–	01 (7%)	15
Rajasthan Patrika	27 (71%)	08 (21%)	03 (8%)	11 (29%)	38
Danik Navjyoti	26 (76%)	05 (15%)	02 (6%)	01 (3%)	34
Rastradhoot	27 (50%)	18 (33%)	04 (7%)	05 (9%)	54

In the above tables, it shows that among the stories published most of the stories are just reported without any extensive study and the maximum among them scored by Danik Bhaskar for both environment and water based issues. The Rastradhoot newspaper has maximum coverage of solution based coverage as compared to rest of the three newspapers for environmental problems and water based issues. There were very less follow-ups and law and policy related stories in all the selected newspapers of Rajasthan. As the from above figures data shows that there was less level of prominence given to environment and water based issues in Rajasthan Patrika and Danik Bhaskar, being top two dailies as compared to Rastradhoot and Danik Navjyoti.

Conclusion

It is concluded from the study that the coverage so far by the four dailies of Rajasthan was very less and seasonal. The top two dailies of Rajasthan gave more importance to political news as compared to the other news

items which will have impact on all the living beings on this planet. As the climate change and global warming are the international issues but still the coverage of these take place only when any international summits took place. There was very less in-depth stories published on environment and water based issues in the following newspapers. As the Rajasthan is the semi arid state where the scanty rainfall and high prevalence of water security issues and barely the extensive stories on water issues like conservation, harvesting, water management etc, given any considerable appearance in the newspapers. The analysis showed that maximum number of appearance on environment and water issues given by Rastradhootnewspaper, following by Danik Navjyoti and so on. The Rastradhoot and Danik Navjyoti has maximum number of stories which includes considerable space given to editorials. The finding of the study reveal that the placement of stories were mostly confined to inside pages, as the placement of the articles is another aspect to attain public attention. In the era of global climate change, the environment related issues were not given much prominence to be allocated on front page. The front page of newspaper determines the news value of important stories and mostly the coverage given to political issues and on other hand, if environment issues consider for front page that only if there is any huge disaster or natural calamity.

Overall, it can be garnered that media coverage of environmental problems with special preference to water issues were to some extent but there is need to increase the amount of space and extensive coverage. The top two dailies of Rajasthan i.e. Rajasthan Patrika and Danik Bhaskar may seem to make less impact on the public and lack coverage on environment and water based issues. The newspaper Rastradhoot was balanced enough in its approach in covering environmental news which includes few editorials as compared to other newspapers. Therefore, there is need to give extensive coverage to environmental issues and water based issues and also the placement of articles related to the environment must be given importance to appear on front pages. As it will help to generate awareness among the public and make them more informed about the environment.

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