

The Role of Media in Promoting Environmental Awareness and Sustainable Behaviour

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Abstract:

The concept of environment and the various problems that had emerged within the realm of environment is a heated topic of discussion in the modern times. Environment has provided us with all the necessities of life. The increase in human population has resulted in the happenings of some detrimental defects in the core of our environment. Various developmental projects initiated in the name of the advancements in the field of science and technology and to combat the growing demands of the population and the satisfaction of human desires has resulted in environmental exploitation by the humans themselves. This exploitation of our natural environment has given rise to various problems such as global warming, climate change, deforestation etc. and has sought global attention in the recent times. All such things have posed a serious threat to the human existence. The need of the hour is to put collective efforts in tackling the environmental issues and to adopt the practice of sustainable development. Media in this context works as a powerful mechanism in raising environmental consciousness through increased awareness of the ill hazards of the environmental degradation and the necessary strategies that can be undertaken to lessen the negative consequences of environmental degradation.

Keywords: Environment, media, environmental consciousness, environmental degradation, sustainable development.

INTRODUCTION:

The term environment is defined in the dictionary as a natural world comprising of a complex interrelationship between the existing physical, biological and chemical entities. The term environment refers to the aggregate of all the exterior factors and impacts that exerts a deep influence upon the subsistence and development of all the living beings (Odum, 1971). The term had its origin in a French word 'environner' which implies being encircled or to surround. Thus the term environment refers to the natural surroundings that surround us and also upon which our entire existence is being dependent. Environment consists of the biotic or living components (plants, animals, microorganisms and fungi) as well as the abiotic or the non-living components (sunlight, water, air, soil composition, temperature and minerals). The interaction between these components helps in creating and sustaining a complete ecosystem. And also if any discrepancy occurs in between their interaction, each of the components faces serious consequences. Thus the environment consists of all the elements that make life possible on the earth. Environment can therefore be defined as the aggregate whole of all the living and the non-living components and the significant events and the influences that surrounds an organism.

Environment can be categorised into natural and artificial forms. The first category i.e. the natural environment consists of those that exist naturally: rivers, hills, trees etc. It does not involve any forms of human interferences. On the other hand artificial environment is those that are wholly created by humans for meeting out their various purposes and satisfying their wants such as swimming pool, park, school buildings etc.

Methodology:

In order to carry out the proposed work, both qualitative and analytical approach has been adopted. The present work is based upon both the textual and an interpretive study. The interpretations are based upon the primary and secondary sources compiled from a variety of articles, periodicals and websites. The paper examines the concept of environment and the various serious consequences that has emerged as a result of environmental degradation. The work throws light upon how media can act as a central force in making the people aware of the consequences of human actions and how through adequate skills and techniques we can combat the issue of environmental degradation.

Media as a tool of Environmental awareness and promoter of Sustainable Development:

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP, 2022) defines environment as a sum-total of all the physical, chemical and biological entities that exert either a direct or an indirect response upon the living organisms. The earth is the only planet in the solar system that supports the existence of life upon it. The term environment encompasses a broader context that includes everything external to an organism which serves as a base for the existence and interaction of all life forms. The various physical, biological, social and economic factors together constitute into a unified system to denote the concept of environment (Carson, 1962). Although environment shares an interconnection with the subsistence and the developmental growth of individuals, yet in due course of time it is viewed that the human actions have led to the depletion of the environment leading to a global cause of concerns amongst the nations.

The survival of all the living beings is dependent and is made possible only because of the environment surrounding them. Environment provides with all the requirements that are deemed necessary for the perseverance of all the life forms. Environmental problems have gained global attention during the present time. The rise of media communication had facilitated the increase in people's concerns towards the various environmental issues and the possible measures that can be undertaken to tackle the environmental problems and gaining a suitable understanding of the need to adopt the policies of sustainable development. Thus media acts as a strong tool of promoting environmental consciousness amongst its audiences.

The portrayal of the earth images taken from space in 1960's gave rise to environmental consciousness amongst the people which in due course of their time became the archetype of the earth being an exquisite determinate unified whole, (Dryzek, 1997). With this environmental concerns came to the forefront and gradually grew with the passing years of time. From the geographical point of view as has been forwarded by the geographers, the rise in the environmental anomalies and the contamination posing a possible threat to human survival has gained the attention of the layman towards it in the present times, (Singh, 2000).

The degradation of the natural environment out of the selfish needs and desires of the people and to satisfy the growing demands of the increasing population is an indicative warning of the frail economic

and social conditions of the nations (EPA, 1997). The widely used forms of mass media including the newspapers, TV and the radio have become social awareness tool providing insights of the environmental matters. Mass media have a diversified role to play in a society which leads to the promotion of novelty, accommodating and progression.

Advancement in the field of communication facilities has brought a revolutionary change in today's world. Media through its various forms can now act as a powerful mechanism of making people aware and informing them of the various matters that emerges in the context of environment and also how to combat those issues in the most ethical and moral manner. Both print media (i.e., newspapers, magazines etc.) and broadcast media (i.e., radio, television etc.) reaches out to its mass audiences and have a great social and moral responsibility of promoting environmental concerns amongst the masses.

A healthy environment promotes a sustainable form of life. But during the recent times, it is seen that the environment is being exploited by the humans themselves. Excessive cutting down of trees, overuse of pesticides and fertilisers, increased used of fuelled vehicles etc, has severe negative consequences upon the nature and to the humans themselves. In this respect, media helps the people understand the scientific reasons or the knowledge associated with each of our environmental concerns. For instance, the sudden changes in the climatic condition, troubles associated with and the reasons related to the melting of glaciers, the rise in pollution levels be it land, water, air or any other forms of pollution, the loss of biodiversity etc. can be understood or their in-depth knowledge can be promoted easily and simultaneously to the mass audiences through the use of media in the forms of films, storytelling, documentaries, news coverage etc.

Media through its various awareness and educational programs portrayed through its various platforms acts as a strong tool in elevating the concerns of environmental issues. The media contents are displayed in the layman language making it easily accessible and understandable even the complex of concepts or things. It is because of these that the people can easily get through the most complicated and the scientific facts of the environment and take necessary timely actions to combat the environmental problems. Media acts as an influencing force in motivating and forming and raising public voices in favour of protecting our environment.

In the early 20th century, awareness for environmental protection took place an important aspect among society through print and online media. As a conceptual aspect, the concept of environment means the 'natural environment' comprising of animals, plants and microbes, a natural sphere upon which humans can ultimately interact with the mother earth for food, shelter and reproduction to a new life form. Ruse (1995) described the meaning of nature based on three divisions such as (a) nature can be meant as the universe and its contents, (b) the living world and (c) everything in nature. It is undeniable that, media have played a big role to aware people about various environment issues

The responsibility of conserving the environment rests not only upon the governments alone but the individual efforts also matters in making the concept of environmental preservation a success. The study and the practice of environmental ethics enable the individuals to maintain a harmonious unity with nature (Leopold, 1949). The branch of philosophical study that helps us to have a better understanding of the wonderful relationship between the nature and the humans in an ethical manner can be termed as the 'Environmental Ethics'. The study enables us to examine the kind of human actions that can exert a significant influence upon our mother planet, the beings existing in it and also provides a clear vision of sustainability with regard to our future generations. Good and moral actions promote the form of

environment that we all long to live in. On the other hand immoral or inhumane actions can have an adverse effect impacting severely and can even possess threat to our present and future existence.

Environmental awareness can be expressed as a comprehensive understanding of the delicate state of our natural world and the need of protecting it. It enables us to gain a significant insight into the ecological processes, the possible effects of human actions and adhering to the norms of sustainable practices (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). Awareness of preserving the natural environment signifies adopting ethical and sustainable practices. The role of the government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and various educational institutions through the effective use of media have been recognized in the effective spread of environmental awareness and in making people conscious of the various hazards like deforestation, air pollution etc. that can emerge as a result of environmental exploitation. For instance, widespread media coverage of the 2019 Amazon rainforest fires and the 2023 global heat-waves heightened global concern and pressured governments to adopt stricter environmental policies. The various campaigns related to the environment like 'Earth Hour', 'World Environment Day' and 'Plastic-Free July' has gained visibility through mass-media coverage influencing individual attitude and behaviour. Advertising campaigns and public service announcements (PSAs) often highlights the consequences of environment neglect, encouraging people to take individual and collective action. Thus media can be regarded as a requisite conveyer of environmental education and advocacy.

The concept of 'environmental communication' indicates the utilization of various communication approaches or schemes in the successful reciprocation of messages and necessary information in forming and sculpting the attitudes, behaviours and understandings with regard to the environment (Cox & Pezzullo, 2016). Media acts as a mediator between the scientific knowledge and human perception. Through media, the complicated environmental problems are presented in before the general masses in the simplest and understandable descriptive forms. In this context, we can cite the epoch-making roles portrayed through the documentaries like 'An Inconvenient Truth' and 'Our Planet' that had been successful in meeting out the climate change and biodiversity concerns across the globe.

The traditional forms of media including the television, newspapers and the radio have been pivotal in efficaciously carrying out the environmental communication. The emergence of digitalised media through the various social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube etc has further facilitated the rapid transmission and receiving of information and messages and has instigated individual participation in environmental movements (Anderson, 2017). These digitalised equipments have standardized the environmental discourse permitting the individuals and the community-based conversations to contribute to the global conversation on sustainability.

Conclusion:

Human activities have resulted in the rapid degradation of our natural environment which has resulted in the global cause of concern in the 21st century. Mere change in policy making and putting forward the scientific solutions cannot be regarded as sufficient enough to solve the environmental conflicts. In this regard the media has endeavoured as an impressive apparatus in raising the environmental concerns amongst the individuals. The media through its various contents portrayed through its various forms has helped in shaping the public attitude, determines their behaviour and deploys the combined efforts of the individual masses towards the preservation of our environment (Boykoff, 2019).

Thus media is regarded as one of the most powerful tool for promoting environmental awareness in the modern times. Its main role is to provide information, educate and prepare the masses to act in favour of

ecological sustainability. Through traditional and digital platforms, media escalates the environmental issues, influences policy and fosters behavioural change. Thus the success of media depends on accuracy, inclusivity, and sustained engagement. The adequate training provided to the reporters in covering the news of environmental issues can be a vital step in showcasing a true picture of it. Thus boosting of the journalists in-depth understandings and analysis of environmental science can ensure accurate and in-depth reporting (Hansen, 2018). Similarly, promoting environmental literacy, providing encouragement for public participation, withstanding misinformation, supporting community media and integration of entertainment along with education together can enhance in strengthening the media's role in the promotion of environmental awareness. As environmental crisis increases globally, the influencing power of media becomes not merely a communication strategy but a moral imperative for ensuring a sustainable future. Thus a well-informed society-nurtured through responsible media can act as a cornerstone of global environmental stewardship.

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