

Print Media Coverage of Environment Issues: Content Analysis of Indian Language Newspapers of Punjab, India

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Abstract

Environment is a crucial topic of discussion in the present scenario, especially in Punjab. The state is often portrayed negatively due to straw burning, a practice that significantly impacts air quality. This study aims to examine print media coverage of environmental issues. Two major daily newspapers of Punjab-Dainik Jagran (Hindi) and Ajit (Punjabi)-were analyzed from October to December 2024 using the content analysis method. These newspapers were selected based on their circulation and acceptability in the state.

The study found that Dainik Jagran covered environmental issues in three ways: problem-focused, solution-oriented with success stories, and event-based (PSE). This newspaper emphasized straw burning and agriculture-related issues. Ajit, a regional daily, is known for its strong focus on Punjabi culture and environmental issues. It is the only newspaper in Punjab that dedicates half a page weekly to agriculture and environmental concerns. The majority of environment-related news in both newspapers was published in October and November. Additionally, both newspapers featured articles and editorials on a priority basis once a week. The study concludes that regional newspapers are more committed to environmental issues than national ones.

Keywords: Punjab, Environment, PSE, Straw Burning, Agriculture.

Introduction

Print media has played a pivotal role in shaping public discourse on environmental issues, evolving from minimal coverage to in-depth reporting that influences policy and public opinion.

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Print Media Coverage of Environment Issues

Historically, newspapers like France's *Le Monde* were slow to address environmental concerns. Established in 1944, *Le Monde* initially exhibited skepticism and provided minimal coverage of climate change. Over time, however its stance evolved, leading to the creation of dedicated sections like "Planet" in 2008. This shift underscores the growing recognition of environmental issues within mainstream media (Wakim, N. 2024).

First, it should be understood that both regional and national media can become more powerful only if they highlight critical issues such as the environment and public health in a logical manner. As India moves towards becoming an economic powerhouse, it is essential to balance industrial growth with environmental sustainability. Environmental conflict is essentially an economic conflict in developing countries (Gadgil & G., 1995). Media faces the challenge of balancing economic growth stories with environmental concerns in India. Although national media outlets often operate under corporate influence, it is crucial to determine whether they genuinely prioritize environmental issues or merely use them as part of public relations campaigns.

Environment-related reporting is a scientific endeavor that has helped shape public perception (Weingart et al., 2000). One advantage of media as an environmental watchdog is its ability to assist governments in formulating eco-friendly laws and technological advancements. However, a key concern is that the well-known agenda-setting theory sometimes dilutes interest in environmental news. This theory explains how media selects and prioritizes issues by informing audiences about what is deemed important (McCombs et al., 1972). The gatekeeping role of media influences both the selection and presentation of news items. This trend is particularly evident in environmental reporting, where certain stories are framed to maintain a positive public image.

Another important part is that environment is also connected with social and culture aspects of any country as well as region. So in this context media cannot ignore this important issue. One crucial component of socio-ecological systems' operation is media content. To create a public and policy agenda that is supportive of mainstreaming environmental issues into all significant societal

actions, it is necessary to acknowledge the role of the media (Jari, L.2012). Understand that media have power to hold public opinion on ecological issues. A mass media-assisted, widely participative method of directed social change in a society that aims to give the majority of people more control over their involvement and promote both social and material growth (Singh, B. 2006).

Media houses involvement especially newspaper can play an impressive role to create awareness about environment issues. Newspapers continue to devote more space to campaigns, environmental issues, and other endeavors. For an environmental conservation campaign to be implemented successfully in any region through local dialect, folk media, and the regional press role is crucial Kanozia, R. 2016). Here is an example of a Swachh Bharat Mission campaign that was successfully carried out with the aid of the media in every possible location (Jharotia, A.2018).

Objectives of the study

The researcher aims to achieve the following objectives through this study:

1. To analyze the pattern of news coverage on environmental issues in both newspapers.
2. To examine the approach taken in reporting environmental issues.

Research methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach to ensure systematic and credible findings. Content analysis has been used as an additional pertinent method for this investigation. This approach enables an objective, systematic, and quantitative description of content while assessing the relative importance of references (Berelson et al., 1984).

The study was conducted in 2024, with data collected from news reports, articles, and features published in Dainik Jagran (Hindi) and Ajit (Punjabi). Both newspapers were selected based on their high circulation and influence in Punjab (as per the latest IRS data). All environment-related articles and news items published between October and December 2024 were examined.

Print Media Coverage of Environment Issues

The unit of analysis in this study included news articles, features, and columns that focused primarily on local or regional environmental issues. This included scientific reports on pollution-related health risks, political coverage advocating government action for environmental protection, personal interest stories featuring eco-conscious individuals, and event-based reports highlighting grassroots environmental initiatives.

Contents from the front page (Punjab edition), editorial section, local pullouts, and Sunday specials of both newspapers were analyzed. Notably, Ajit dedicates half a page every Tuesday to environmental issues under the title "Sade Pind Sade Khet." Articles and stories served as the primary units of analysis, while graphics and photographs were not coded independently. The length of each news item and article was also measured to assess the importance given to environmental coverage.

The researcher categorized and sub-categorized the text from both newspapers using the following parameters:

Table 1: Content Analysis Parameters

Categories	Measures of Prominence	Orientation of Reporting	Source of Text	Types of Reporting
Sub - Categories	Frequency of Reporting	Type of Report (Problem, Solution, Event)	Primary (Reporter, Observation, Q&A)	Positive
	Page of item	Nature of Reporting (News, Feature, Websites) Article, Review)	Secondary (Publications,	Negative
	Location (Up, Down, Left, Right)	---	---	Neutral
	Photo Space	---	---	-----
	Text Size	---	---	-----

Findings and discussion

Measures of prominence

Frequency of reporting

Dainik Jagran covered straw burning and related environmental issues extensively in October and November, publishing problem-based stories, success stories, and event-based reports. In October, 75 news items related to environmental issues were published over 25 days, while November saw 63 news items over 21 days. In December, the number of articles declined to 21.

Similarly, Ajit followed a consistent reporting pattern, with 72 news articles in October, 69 in November, and 50 in December. The newspaper's unique half-page section, "Sade Pind Sade Khet," focused on agricultural innovations and environmental tips.

Page for the item

The Dainik Jagran newspaper published news related to straw burning and environmental issues on the front page along with Punjab edition and event-based news on the 2nd and 3rd pages in local pullouts. Mostly articles on environment-related topics once a week on the editorial page and features were published in the Sunday magazine.

The Ajit newspaper published environment-related news on the front page and half a page of 14-page edition was devoted to agriculture and environment issues every Tuesday per week. Most of the features and book reviews on the environment issues were published in the Sunday magazine.

Placement of news

The Dainik Jagran newspaper published news of environment-related upward trends on the front page of the paper. Sometimes news was displayed with banner headlines in the national edition, but in the Punjab page, mostly news was published on the upper half of the page on both the left and right sides.

The Ajit paper published news of the environment on the front page of the paper, and also below the fold of the page. Features were published in the Sunday magazine related to environmental issues on the upward side of the second page.

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Place for photos

The Dainik Jagran newspaper published a photo in a 2:5 ratio in the paper, which means if the news were published in 5 columns, then the photo covers 2 columns within the news. The importance of news depends on the space given to the photo. Another side of Ajit newspaper is more focused on the content of news rather than photos, so this paper does not follow any particular pattern of allocating photo space.

Text size

The Dainik Jagran newspaper published news in the month of October and November, across six columns relating to straw burning on the front page of the paper and eight columns on the Punjab page, which distributed 4+4 between problem- and solution-based stories. In local pullout only two or three column news were published.

The Ajit newspaper (circulated mainly in Punjab) published more frequently environment based news in the months of October and November in the fifth or sixth columns mostly on the National page. Besides, five to six column-based features were published on half a page once a week.

Orientation of reporting

Under this category important sub-categories are classified into different types of report and nature of reporting.

Types of report

Three methods were used by the Dainik Jagran newspaper to disseminate information on environmental issues: problem, solution, and event. Compared to December, the months of October and November had a higher frequency of this pattern. Using the same sequence and pattern as the solution series, this work has emphasized the harm that burning straw causes to both the environment and human health.

Over the course of three months, from October to December, the Ajit newspaper published pieces on environmental issues that were more event-centric and view-centric. Because the topics covered in this newspaper are more aggressive.

Nature of reporting

The Dainik Jagran newspaper published many types of reports on environmental issues in the form of news, articles and features. Features on surrounding issues were published more in the Sunday magazine section, articles on the editorial page once a week, and news was continuously published in the national, Punjab page and the local pullout.

The Ajit newspaper also printed news on the above mentioned topic in the form of news, articles and features. Features on environmental issues were published in half a page, which was printed every Tuesday per week along with the Sunday magazine section. Articles were on the editorial page appeared on an average twice a week, and news was printed on a daily basis.

Source of text

Primary sources

Primary sources mean collect information from direct source such as observation by reporter field reports and expert analyses, which were used for problem and solution-based articles, while event-oriented news relied on secondary sources like press releases.

Types of reporting

The Dainik Jagran newspaper published news in a balanced way. The problem-orientated news was published with negative and critical views based on facts. Besides that, solution-based stories were printed with positive and motivational attitudes. Despite the fact that editorials and articles about environmental issues were produced for knowledge and informational purposes.

The Ajit newspaper printed text material in more descriptive and analytical ways. It highlighted fact-based stories, especially for environmental issues. But the pattern of features for agriculture and the environment in the paper is more diverse.

Conclusion

The study concludes that Ajit gives more importance to environmental issues than Dainik Jagran, maintaining consistent coverage throughout the year. While national newspapers focus on trending issues like straw burning during peak months, regional newspapers prioritize environmental concerns year-round.

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Limitations of the study

- ◆ The study is limited to two newspapers.
- ◆ Statistical tools were not used for data analysis.
- ◆ The three-month timeframe may not be sufficient to assess long-term environmental coverage.

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