

Guest Editorial Preface

Special Issue on Environmental Communication

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Good air, water and food are the basic necessities of life. But development has caused the deterioration of the quality of air, water and soil. Industrialization and chemical agriculture have contributed to development on one hand but on the other, have led to environmental degradation, resulting in various health risks. Children are more vulnerable to environmental hazards, especially in developing countries. Their vulnerability is worsened by the lack of protective policies and medical and public health interventions (Creel, 2002). In fact, China, Bangladesh, India and Indonesia have the highest number of deaths due to air pollution. The role of media and communication are vital in redefining the environment for a better future. The cost of inaction will be tremendous. The media helps people to understand the importance of preserving resources, to reduce the harmful impacts of human-made alterations, to be aware of the consequences of human activities, and to identify remedial solutions (Cox, 2006).

Technological developments have changed the relationship between the media and the public. Social media involves various actors such as politicians, public, non-governmental organizations, and governments. Nowadays, a good number of politicians too use social media. In a research study at the University of Michigan mentioned Prime Minister Narendra Modi as the second most followed Indian on Twitter (Bansal, 2016). Given the scenario, the media has an overarching role in creating environmental awareness. Conference, workshops and policies on environment and development are widely covered by the media. The public gets most of the environmental information through the media. This has led to a considerable increase in research in environmental communication. This special issue on the topic of Environmental Communication comprises articles on climate change communication, environmental campaigns, and mobile advisory to farmers. The articles critically evaluate the role the media plays in disseminating environmental information to the people. I present here the perspectives of each of the articles.

CLIMATE CHANGE COMMUNICATION AMONG YOUTH

With the new factor of climate change setting in, extreme events such as droughts, floods, and erratic rainfall hit the poor and marginalized severely. The flooding of Chennai in 2015 and its impact is an eye-opener. The paper by B. N. Neelima investigated what messages and messengers best engage young people with climate change and its solutions. A survey with young adults in the two metropolises of India – Chennai and Bengaluru – revealed a heightened concern for global environment and climate change issues. The youth rely more on social media, especially blogs and networking groups for information on climate change.

The study establishes an association between media use and knowledge of climate change among the youth. Since the media affects the understanding and perception of climate change issues, its impact on shaping perceptions about climate change should not be underestimated. What we need today is heightened media coverage of issues relating to climate change. This will certainly keep the momentum of public awareness and understanding of climate change issues going.

NEWSPAPER FRAMING OF CLIMATE CHANGE

The paper by T. Nirmala with the guest editor as co-author analyzed the online newspaper coverage of climate change and sustainability issues from the theoretical perspective of framing. It argued that the coverage of local issues was found to be less. The English language paper highlighted sustainability issues better than the regional (Tamil) newspaper. Local people and the local environmental challenges were under-reported. This showed the lack of journalistic capacity in understanding the local environmental challenges. It suggested that journalists must improve their knowledge and capacity, develop better thrive, and should have political sensitivity to report effectively on climate change as it is a cross-cutting issue spanning across politics and development. A very few stories suggested solutions to tackle climate change and sustainability issues. This lacuna must be addressed immediately to face the challenges. Climate change communication in newspapers and local news stories, particularly in regional newspapers, is the need of the hour.

CAMPAIGNS IN TRADITIONAL AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Environmental campaigns may be effectively addressed through the media, especially social media. Sunitha Kuppuswamy's study suggested that creating more online pages on various social media and popularizing environmental messages may increase the awareness and participation of the public. After getting appropriate awareness about the conservation of natural resources through environmental campaigns, people show interest to follow it up as well as share their knowledge and experience with neighbours. After the campaigns, the public had decided to reduce the use of two-wheelers, increased the use of energy saving lights, and intended to buy recycled products. The environment enthusiasts need to create more online pages on various social media and popularize environmental messages. People find these messages reliable and worth acting upon.

MOBILES FOR ENHANCING LIVELIHOOD OF FARMERS

The study by G. Sakthivel Murugan with the guest editor as co-author is on mobile extension in enhancing the livelihood of farmers in India. It revealed that mobile advisories have strengthened the local agricultural extension system by updating farmers' knowledge and skills. These messages enhanced their knowledge in crop management, latest farming technologies, agriculture-related government entitlements, and post-harvest techniques. These skills are very much useful for them to get adapted to changing climate scenarios and to have improved livelihood opportunities. This has brought significant improvement in the capacity of farmers. The major shift has taken place wherein farmers directly interact with the experts and scientific community using digital platform to discuss their livelihood-related issues.

LESSONS LEARNT

There are a few green initiatives across India. But the question is that of sustainability. Many an occasion, such initiatives cease once the project phase ends. There is a need to build in sustainability as part of the projects. Mechanism such as capacity building and incentives should also be put in place

to encourage journalists in the mainstream media and users of social media to carry on environmental activism through the media. The mainstream media has taken up environmental issues vigorously when there is support from outside such as that happened for the 'Save Our Tigers' campaign in India. Climate change campaigns through Facebook were also in hyper mode, particularly by the environmental non-governmental organization Greenpeace till the organization was banned in India. Thus, the media does not exist in isolation and we need to have environmental activism in all spheres of activity.

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