

Original Research Article

Print Media Coverage on the Environmental Issues: an Analysis of the Local Newspapers of Rangpur, Bangladesh

Abstract

This study aims at identifying the real scenario of coverage on the environmental issues of two local daily newspapers of Rangpur city in Bangladesh. A mixed was method applied to conduct the study following issue-attention cycle and agenda setting theory as the theoretical framework. This study was conducted on the a total number of 102 newspapers of 2023 through content analysis and observation method. The study found that The Daily Juger Alo (DJA) published 113 (3.02%) and The Daily Dabanol (DD) published 42 (2.34%) environment related news. Both dailies covered 120 (77.42%) simple news ignoring in-depth reporting. They mainly emphasized on climate change, natural disaster, weather, environment education and protection and flood related news. They covered the issue in mostly inner page and provided less space, one way reporting and ignored the diversity of presentation on the issue. Special training on effective environment journalism, social responsibility of the newspapers and integrated participation should be ensured to improve the condition for the betterment of the environment in the study area.

Key words: environmental issues, local newspapers, coverage, Rangpur

Introduction:

Environment is the status of our surroundings the surroundings of us. It has become a talk of the topics in the modern world. It is being continuously contaminated by the human being in all over the world. Growth of population, ambitious and irresponsible activities causes the adverse impact on the environment. Various natural calamities like flood, cyclone, earthquake, river erosion and disaster regularly affects the world especially low laying countries like Bangladesh (Rahmatullah et. al, 2021). Bangladesh has a population of 16.9 million with 1.30% annual rate of growth (Economic Census, 2023). It is one of the most densely populated countries in the world. It is situated at the side of Bay of Bengal, Sundarbans, India and Myanmar. It is engulfed with thousands of rivers having headwaters mostly in the Himalaya and hills in India. It causes regular flood and drought in the country. Those create a pressure on the natural resources and environment. Environment problem creates health crisis regularly (Metcalf, 2003). Various pollutions, urbanization, industrialization, disposal of solid waste and vehicle dependency cause the serious environmental problems in Bangladesh. It is in the high risk of climate change and global warming (Ivy, 2016). It affects the public health, ecosystem and economic growth (Alam, 2009). Recent study has found that the sea level of Bangladesh has increased radically up to 5.8

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milliliters and it can be flooded more 8-15% areas of the four coastal districts. It can increase the salty land more that 50-65% in the area. Thus the total ecosystem will be affected (Saha, 2024).

Environment journalism has become a strong sub-field for the mass media across the globe. It has become popular among the ~~mass people~~ masses. Mass media become a significant tool for creating mass awareness to ensure healthy behavior to protect and sustain the environment (Jharotia, 2018). It also plays crucial role in enhancing ~~the~~ public understandings on the prospects and problems, law and policy, eco-friendly mechanism and development related activities regarding the environment (Shumshunnahar & Amin, 2023). Mass media especially print media has become more useful to raise awareness for environment protection and safety (Ajman, 2024). Newspaper is considered as an influential tool in ensuring environment friendly action through message dissemination to change the community perception and raise awareness (Roba, 2012). Thus newspaper has become a popular media for environment related news and information in everywhere in Bangladesh.

Local newspaper has immense popularity in Bangladesh as most of the people live in the urban area (Outside of the capital). It has a historical background regarding newspaper publication. The first newspaper of the country was *Rangapur Bartabaha* published in August of 1847 from Rangpur (Chakraborty, 2012). Local newspaper can play a healthy role in creating public awareness and effective opinion on the environment issue publishing various news, editorials and columns. It helps to educate, persuade and motivate the local people to protect the environment (Lawhan, Pierce & Bouwer, 2018). So the coverage of environmental issues in local newspaper is very crucial in environment education, learning and practice. That's why; this study has planned to identify the actual scenario of the coverage of environment related issue in the local newspapers of Rangpur City Corporation of Bangladesh following mixed method approach and descriptive analysis.

Statement of the Problem:

Environmental dimensions have become major concerning issues across the globe. Every year world faces various new problems with some new records, example- 2023 has become the warmest year and it has running consequently form last 12 years (UN, 2023). The South Asian countries especially Bangladesh has been suffering a lot due to environmental degradation. Bangladesh has recently taken various development projects to improve the living quality and keep pace with modern world. It has already become the role model of development in the world. But the outcome of the process is not working diligently due to geographical position and environmental problems. Moreover, it has been engulfed with various natural and man-made disasters every year and decreases the possibility of ensuring sustainable development. Mass awareness and effective participation in protective ~~veon~~ mechanism is the prerequisite for sustainable environment. Mass media namely print media can play a pivotal role in this regard in Bangladesh. Rangpur is located at the northern part of the country and become a division of various environmental problems. So, the local newspaper of the area has huge responsibilities to protect the environment through mass awareness and actions. There are very few studies on the issue with limited resources and angles. It is against this background that this study identifies the role of modern media education and information dissemination in relation to environmental issues That's why; it is very essential to measure the real scenario of the issue among the local newspapers in the northern part of Bangladesh ~~for the sake of modern media and environment.~~

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Objectives of the Study:

The main objective of this study is to find out the total coverage of environmental issues in the local daily newspapers of Rangpur, Bangladesh. There are some other objectives in the below-

1. To find out the level of coverage to the environmental issues in the dailies,
2. To identify the reported environmental issues in the local dailies,
3. To investigate the level of importance given to issues reported in the dailies (The level of importance given to environmental issues will be determined here through; Nature of the story, Item, Placement (page, Space and Trends.)

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Literature Review:

Mass media can significantly shape public perceptions and attitudes towards environmental issues. But there is the shortage of comprehensive coverage on the issues of print media. They provide a very limited focus on the subject and fail to fulfill the responsibilities towards society (Sahni & Mahajan, 2024). Mass media especially print media plays a crucial role in identifying environmental related challenges through raising awareness and fostering public sufferings. It combines of superficial and investigative reporting varying source usage. There exists resource constraints and censorship. It can be improved through training, investigative focus, source diversification and ethical reporting. These aspects can promote public awareness, policy disclosure and societal change following environmental sustainability of Bangladesh (Ajman, 2024). Print media coverage on the issue is very concerning and provides only news-based coverage focusing social or political context arises from environmental problems. It states that regional media coverage on the issue is mainly problematic (Grigoryan, 2023). Media is a major element of the fight for establishing healthy environment. But they are not in the ideal position. They don't have any column/desk to monitor the negativity. They should scrutinize the issues for ensuring accountable and healthy environment (Obasi & Msughter, 2023). Newspaper publishes 1.57% environmental news daily focusing mainly natural disaster. Most of the news (89.27%) is simple story following lack of diversity, follow-up story and sufficient use of illustrations. The main factors of the low level of coverage are political, economic, social, cultural, technological and scientific issue (Drago, 2022). Media works as a bridge between various types of knowledge about climate change and environment. It often mediates and influences public perceptions, attitudes and behaviors. Mass people also depend on the mechanism to interpret and make sense of environmental complexity. But we don't find qualitative and effective report on the issue due lack of priority, lack of effective training, awareness, sensitivity and basic climate literacy, information sources and access to public information, limited specialization of journalists, engagement with different stakeholders and lack of resources (Janashia, Gverdtiteli & Kavtaradze, 2022). Environmental Issues are extremely under-represented in the education of social workers. It needs to reform the subject with the issues and green social work with inclusive topic focusing the interrelationship between social and environmental problems (Papadimitriou, 2022). Media coverage regulates public perceptions, policy governing mechanism and social development. But it focuses on only economic development exploiting natural resource. It confines in climate change, oil and gas exploitation and marine harvesting. It ignores emergency preparedness and economic transition and focuses a pattern similarly with government policy (Katterbor et. al, 2021). Media tries to construct public perceptions through framing and public frames affect media frame. It focuses the issue like brick kilns, pollution, air,

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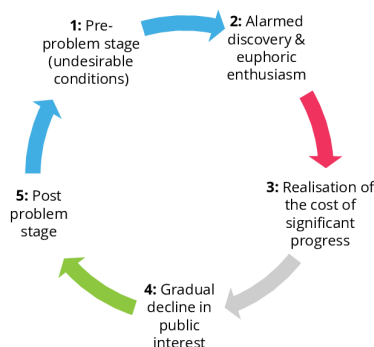
monsoon, power plant, death, meteorology, climate change, environmental management and water. Climate change and air quality get main focus (Al-Zaman & Khan, 2021). Local newspaper publishes 1.57% environmental issues daily focusing natural disaster mainly. Most of news (89.2%) is simple story focusing lack of diversification, lack of follow up news and sufficient use of illustration (Rahmatullah et. al, 2021). The issue is not covered sufficiently in print media. Newspaper provides only small portion space to the issue and marginalized in relation to their presentation (Ferdous & Khatun, 2020). Radio station plays a vital role in disseminating environmental concerns among the people. Most of the stations (57%) cover the issue but unpopular one. The focusing items are forest and wildlife conversation and water resource management. They cover the issue during the prime time (73%). Limited funding causes in finding experts and journalists. An engagement strategy is required to improve the scenario (Paudel, Bastola & Lopchan, 2020). Newspapers don't cover sufficiently with different style. The issues are not only ignored but also given small portions with marginalized presentation (Hasan & Dutta, 2019). The role of media is rapid and effective in influencing the mentality and sensitizing the people to protect the environment focusing the negative effects of environment degradation. Newspapers cover the weather as environment issue mostly editorial and features story. It focuses air pollution, climate change, water resources and wildlife resources. The media publish a good number of stories with considerable spacing (Koundal, 2019). Journalists are the prerequisite of effective environmental reporting and sustainable community. But they face same problems like government agencies and officials, organizations and powerful individuals, internal censorship from owners and editors. ICT based training and balanced reporting is required to improve the status (John & Jonjua, 2018). Media are considered as an agent for informing and educating people on the environment issue. It articulates public perception on the issue. Journalists write on the issue to provide a link among field workers, citizen and policy makers. Print media coverage on the issue is not at desired level. They provide less importance, less space and mostly at inner page to the issue. Environment friendly editorial policy is required to improve the scenario (Jana, 2017). Media mostly cover climate change, poverty and HIV/AIDS in informative way. It pays attention to biodiversity and cleaner technologies focusing the climate change. It follows the different trends and patterns regarding the issue (Barkemeyer, Givry & Figge, 2017). Newspapers can shape public perceptions, attitudes and actions towards green environment diligently. But they provide limited space, poor importance, lack of picture and absence of investigative news focusing the issue (Meda, 2016). Media can create a comprehensive approach in environment protection mechanism with various stakeholders. It also can influence CSR regarding the issue (Pollach, 2014). Newspapers have significant focus on the issue in Bangladesh. Some national dailies run advocacy and awareness campaigns on river from grabbing and encroachment of riverbanks and wetlands. They also focus on deforestation and pollution. They try to communicate with audience and policy makers through agenda setting and innovative approaches of advocacy. The Daily Star published 28% and The Prothom Alo published 22% environment related news during COP15 (Reza & Haque, 2011).

So, the environmental issue has become a major concerning subject across the globe. It has become a significant news item for the media especially newspaper. The interrelationship of the topic has become area of interest to the researchers. A number of researches have been conducted in national and international level, but a very few in the area. This area and focus are almost new in this study. This study is tried to reveal the real scenario of the coverage of

environmental issue in the local dailies of the northern part of Bangladesh considering place, time, area, importance etc.

Theoretical Framework:

Issue-Attention Cycle Theory: - Mass media especially print media like newspapers have prominent influence on people regarding environment protection mechanism. Assuming the statement that media or public don't put regular focus on a specific issue for a long time, ANTHONY DOWNS proposed a cycle 'issue-attention cycle' in 1972 referring the ups and downs of attention to an environmental issue receives either from the public or from mass media (DOWNS, 1972). The cycle constitutes with five stages shown in below-



Picture: Issue Attention Cycle (Downs, 1972)

Analyzing the cycle, first stage notifies the existence of an uncomfortable situation which doesn't get much captured public attention, second stage informs a situation when public become both aware of and alert of the evil factors of the issue, third stage states a context of public realization for both money allocation and sacrifices to solve the issue, fourth stage signifies a situation of realization the difficulties in solution which discourages the public and new issues come and the final stage implies the condition of replacement by new issue and others. This study has tried to identify the application of the cycle in the coverage of environmental issues in the local newspapers of the research area. Moreover, agenda setting theory has applied to find out the scenario whether the selective media has tried to set any specific agenda regarding the issue in the area.

Methodology:

A mixed method approach has been used to conduct the study. Both qualitative and quantitative method has employed in the study. Researcher has selected 2023 as the immediate past year and recorded as the year of natural calamities, man-made disasters and various elections. Researcher has purposively selected two local daily newspapers for regular and comparative analysis namely *The Daily Juger Alo* (DJA) and *The Daily Dabanol* (DD) published from Rangpur city regularly due to regular circulation, availability and prominence. Both the dailies are more popular and acceptable to the audience in the research area. The total time frame of the study is one year from January 01, 2023 to December 31, 2023. The researcher has selected one newspaper form week following day count like all Saturday of January month, all Sunday of February month etc. A

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total number of 104 newspapers (one for each week of the year of 2023; 52+52=104) from the two newspapers have been selected and analyzed for the study. Content analysis and observation method have been used to collect the primary and secondary data. However, qualitative analysis has been used in this study. The study has grossly focused the total coverage, position, placement, importance, pattern, category, nature of the environmental issues with some journalistic angles. A specific emphasize has given to covered news to identify the focus, trend and treatment to any specific environmental issue of the area. Finally, the findings have been presented in tables and graphs and deepened analysis with statistics (percentages).

Data Analysis:

Table 1.1

1.1 Total Coverage

Newspaper	Total News	Environmental News	Percentage (%)
Daily Juger Alo (DJA)	3,746	113	3.02
Daily Dabanol (DD)	1,795	42	2.34

This study identified that both newspapers made coverage of total 5,541 news stories during the time; DJA published 3,746 stories and DD published 1,795 stories. However, DJA published 113 (3.02%) environmental news and DD published 42 (2.34%) environment news stories.

1.2.1 Position of the Stories

Newspapers	Page			Fold	
	Front Page	Back Page	Inner Page	Upper	Lower
DJA	27	39	46	62	51
DD	20	20	2	28	14

During analyzing the position of the coverage of the research issue, we found that DJA published most of the news at inner page 46 (40.71%), front page 27 (23.97%) and back page 39 (34.51%) while DD published at front and back page 20 (47.62%) for each and 2 (4.76%) for inner page. Moreover, DJA published most of the news at upper folder 62 (54.87%) with 51 (45.13%) news at lower; while DD also published most of the news at upper folder 28 (66.67%) with 14 (33.33%) news at lower folder.

1.3.1.2 Placement of the Stories

Newspapers	Column			
	1C	2C	3C	4C
DJA	47	47	18	1
DD	4	12	18	8

Analyzing the column of the news, we identified that DJA focused on single (47, 41.59%) and double column (47, 41.59%) for the environment news, but DD focused on triple column (18, 42.86%). Furthermore, DJA used triple column in 18 (15.93%) and fourth column in 1 (0.88%) news; while DD used single column at 4 (9.52%) news, double for 12 (28.57%) news and fourth for 8 (19.05%) news.

1.4 Patterns of the News

Newspaper	Just Reporting	Investigative	Follow up	Jump News	Colorful News	Picture	Quotation
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Identifying the seasonal coverage on the issue, we found that both newspapers published wide range of seasonal news during the time. DJA published almost half of total coverage during various season while DD published one-third news on the tract. DJA published a coverage of 19, 19 and 18 for summer, rainy and winter respectively; while DD published 5, 2, 7 news for respectively. It's clear that winter season got much importance during the time.

1.7 News Area and News Agency of the News

Newspaper	Area			Editorial	Use of News Agency	
	Rangpur	National	International		National	International
DJA	76	17	20	7	26	20
DD	32	7	3		5	1

During the time, DJA published 76 news of Rangpur, 17 national and 20 international news of environmental news, while DD published 32, 7 and 3 news stories respectively. Even, DJA published only 7 editorials on issues. However, DJA used 26 as national and 20 for international news agency, while DD used 5 and 1 for the news.

Qualitative Analysis:

Abundance of straight jacket news:

Bangladesh is facing a number of environment problems due to climate change and natural diversity. The northern part of the country has become a city of environmental problems. But local newspapers of Rangpur city didn't pay much attention to the aspects. They published a very little news on the issue following simple news style. Most of the news was straight jacket news. It stated as low and irresponsible activities of the newspapers regarding the real scenario of the issue in the area.

Absence of Diversity:

News diversity can create an effective approach in environment education and action. But the newspapers didn't try to maintain the news diversity publishing investigative, follow-up, and interpretative and case study story. They made a very little coverage following the style respectively investigative report and follow-up. They didn't focus on the alternative. It created monotony to the readers.

Less Importance:

The newspapers provided a very little importance to the environmental issues. They published most of the news in inner page, lower fold and single and double column news; only four editorials. They used only quotation in the news. Most of the news didn't get holistic approach during the time ignoring the local and national major environmental issues. They covered mostly seasonal issue focusing weather and climate change ignoring education and behavior change communication to make betterment of the negativity.

Usage of Illustration:

Illustration can create a cycle of attention to read a story. Local newspaper used the style in a number of news. They covered 68 environment news stories with picture. But the picture quality was not good at all. They added a very low quality picture with almost same size with three columns two inch. The picture was almost opaque and pale. It had identified the negative tendency of covering the issue with picture.

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Absence of Diversity in the Usage of Journalistic Elements:

Proper usage of the journalistic elements makes a news item more attractive and creates interest among the readers. This study found that local newspaper didn't have the sense on the aspect. The newspaper used mostly full line headline, summary intro, pyramid structure, staff reporter's story, local weather story etc. That's why; all the stories seemed almost same and decreased the interest of the readers.

Focused on Seasonal Issue:

Print media mainly focused on the seasonal (rainy, winter and summer) reporting in the research area. Both the local newspapers made a total coverage of 70 (46.16%) news regarding the issue. It stated that they didn't publish different and deep stories regarding the environmental issues excepting weather, temperature and flood. Even they avoided to cover the effect of the stories to aware the people. Most of the news was just to regular story and single column based without proper investigation.

Discussion:

Bangladesh has become one of the most vulnerable and disaster-prone countries in the world due to environmental problems. It has already become a major concern across the country (Alom, 2014). It has also become an essential issue for the mass media in Bangladesh. This study has tried to reveal the real scenario of the coverage of environmental issues in two local dailies (The Daily Juger Alo-DJA & The Daily Dabanol-DD) of Rangpur city in Bangladesh. This study depicts that both the dailies published a total number of 155 news stories during the research time (January 01 to December 31, 2023). DJA published 113 news stories on the issue with 3.022% and DD published 42 news stories with 2.34%. In previous study by Rahmatullah et. al, found that two local dailies published 289 stories on environment issue during three month with 1.91% (DJA) and 1.22% (Daily Prothom Khobor) of the total coverage in Rangpur, Bangladesh (Rahmatullah et. al, 2021). In another study on the issue, Hasan & Dutta found that The Daily Purbokone covered 22% news on front page's upper fold while 6% in lower fold and 9% on the back page's upper fold and 4% in lower; The Daily Azadi covered 14% news of front page's upper fold while 5% in lower and 5% on the back page's upper fold and 10% in lower. Both dailies published 61% and 66% news in inner pages (Hasan & Dutta, 2019). Most of the environmental news covered in inner pages (Hasan & Pryanka, 2019). This study finds that DJA published 9.73% news on front page's upper fold while 14.16% in lower and 25.66% news on back page's upper while 8.85% in lower folder. DD also published 26.19% news on front page's upper fold while 21.43% in lower and 38.10% news on back page's upper while 19.05% in lower folder. Both dailies covered 49 (31.61%) news on the issue in inner pages.

Alam also identified that newspapers emphasized on two column news covering the research issue likely 1c-25, 2c-39, 3c-30, 4c-24 and above/c 26 out of 144 news in The Kaler Kantho, The Ittefaq, The Prothom Alo, The Daily Star and The Jugantor. It also included that most of the covered stories 123 (85.42%) was straight jacket news with only 21 (14.58%) was in-dept reporting (Alam, 2020). This study found both dailies focused different column regarding the issue. DJA covered the news mostly in single and double column likely 1C- 47, 2C- 47, 3C-18, 4C-1 news while DD covered mostly three column likely 1C- 4, 2C- 12, 3C-18 and 4C-8 news. Moreover, DJA published 89 (78.76%) was simple news, 20 (17.70%) was investigative news

and only 4 (3.54%) was follow up news while DD published 31 (73.81%) was simple news, 9 (21.43%) was investigative news and only 2 (4.76%) was follow up news. So, both dailies published 77.42 news as simple reporting, 18.71% was investigative and only 3.87 news was follow up. Analyzing the issues in environmental news, Ferdous & Khatun identified that seminars and conference got the highest coverage and others were pollution, natural disaster, climate change, compensation and international funding etc. They also found that the major sources were news agency, by line, desk reporting and Staff reporting respectively (Ferdous & Khatun, 2020). This study revealed that climate change (21.93%) got the most coverage during the time, while natural disaster (13.55%), weather (12.26%), EEP (11.61%), flood (9.03%), ER (8.39%) and EH (5.81%) were respectively. Identifying the source, we saw that only 3 news was by line story, 47 was for desk reporting, 40 for staff reporter, 31 for national news agency, 21 for international news agency and others were 13. It focused only 15 news stories contained quotation regarding the study and 16 was lack of proper information. So, this study has identified that local newspapers followed *issue-attention cycle* to grow people's attention to various environmental issues during the year. But it was a superficial and simple coverage to the issue. It also found that local dailies didn't try to set agenda for the area as they didn't emphasize any specific issues of the environmental regularly. They provided irregular and only need based coverage to the issues.

Limitations:

~~The research is focused and based on Rangpur division. Due to budget, time and resource constraint it is not possible to cover other divisions of Bangladesh. A total of 102 newspapers are covered under the project which is not a large number. Shortage of necessary and relevant books, journals and written documents in various libraries and institutions regarding the issue is another limitation of this research. Moreover, only two newspapers and 52 newspaper for each (one for each week) is not enough to assess the overall environment coverage. So in the future, it will be needed to analyze all over the year's (365) content of the newspaper.~~

Conclusion:

'The Bangladesh Country Environmental Analysis (CEA) finds air pollution, unsafe water, poor sanitation and hygiene, and lead exposure cause over 272,000 premature deaths and 5.2 billion days of illness annually. These environmental issues cost the equivalent of 17.6 percent of Bangladesh's GDP in 2019. Household and outdoor air pollution have the most detrimental effect on health, leading to nearly 55 percent of premature deaths, which alone cost 8.32 percent of GDP in 2019' (WB, 2024). Bangladesh has already been experiencing the pathways of balanced development since 15 years. But it is suffering from environmental problems also. It has become a major concern for the beloved country. Moreover, Rangpur has also burdened with various environmental issues. Recent development efforts are experiencing obstacles for the issues. Environment related awareness and practice can play a significant role for establishing and strengthening sustainable condition for all. That's why; environment journalism has become popular across the globe. Several researches focused on the issue though few in Bangladesh. The study area is totally new in this dimension.

This study has stated that local newspaper made a simple coverage on the environmental issues ignoring the diversity of news items. It also identified several news items like climate change, weather, natural disaster, manmade disaster, flood, river erosion etc. It also revealed that most of

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the coverage published on inner page, lower folder and one column based story ignoring various angles of journalism. They provided a very simple and improper importance to the news item. So the study has revealed the real scenario of Rangpur division on the issue considering various perspectives. The result of the research work may also add various new dimensions in future media and environment patterns of Bangladesh. They should take necessary steps to improve the coverage of environmental issues providing training and policy formation for the sustainable environment in Bangladesh.

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